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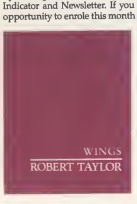

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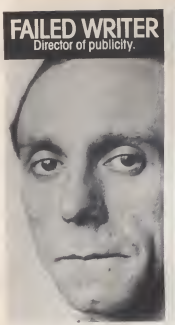

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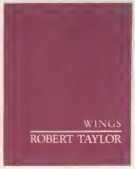

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World War II

6 EDITORIAL

8 PERSONALITY
Behind the Red Army's great generals were "lesser lights" such as divisional commander Vassily Petrenko.
By Jon Guttman

10 ARMAMENT
U.S. Coast Guard's "match-box fleet" was little-noticed on D-day . . . save by the hundreds of people it rescued.
By Truman R. Strobridge

16 UNDERCOVER
Famous for his prewar exploratory flight, Bernt Balchen's wartime activities are of necessity less well-known.
By George A. Reynolds

54 BOOKS
For the U.S. Navy Armed Guard aboard merchant ships, World War II seemed like life in a shooting gallery.
By Richard P. Montpelier

22 CITY'S DEATH THROES
By Patrick McTaggart
Hitler had ordered Breslau to serve as a fortress, and for its people to fight to the death. Even as the Reich was falling, the city's defenders grimly hung on.

30 BEHIND ENEMY LINES
By John Brown
Months after taking the main strongpoints of Timor, the Japanese were forced to deal with Australia's "independent companies" as they waged a continuing guerrilla campaign.

38 ENTER THE FOX
By Dieter Werner Hellriegel
Fifty years ago, the British were on the verge of ousting the Italians from North Africa. Within two months, that situation would be dramatically reversed. How did this come about?

46 MODEL FOR DEFENSE
By Nathan N. Prefer
While Biak's Japanese defenders drew the Americans into a prototypical battle of attrition, the island's fate was also disputed in the air, on and under the sea.

COVER: His face daubed with camouflage, an American paratrooper demonstrates an M1 "flame gun" in France, summer 1944. At that time, his weapon was seeing plenty of use on the other side of the world, on the island of Biak (story, P. 46). LEFT: At Breslau, the Germans disputed every inch of ground to the last days of the war (story, P. 22). MIDDLE: Behind the invasion but close to the beach, U.S. Coast Guard cutters played a life-saving role on D-day (story, P. 10). RIGHT: In February 1941, a contingent of German soldiers had to adapt to a new, unfamiliar and scorchingly hostile environment (story, P. 38).

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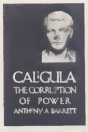

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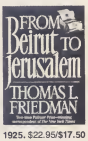

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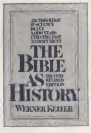

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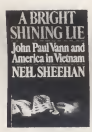

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When Adelaide was bombed by oranges. . .and the man's house flat-out disappeared.

For the newly arriving American allies back in the early 1940s, Australia's coastal cities were recognizable as urban centers, as veritable fonts of civilized thought and activity. The sprawling remainder of wartime Australia, especially the northern rim closest to the Japanese threat (see story, Page 30), was a different matter altogether. Here, life—even without the pressures of war—had been wild and woolly for some time.

"The whole continent of Australia is as undeveloped as the central United States was before the Civil War," wrote an American general to uninitiated colleagues confined to desks in Washington, DC. Truly, it took on-site inspection to quite get the picture of this high-spirited, still-emerging, war-beleaguered nation way *down under*!

With transportation to the lightly populated and highly vulnerable Northern Territory always a problem anyway, the Americans arriving on the scene early in World War II dispatched engineer outfits to build roads, and trucking units to do the driving.

These were not your American interstates of today. Even a hardened Australian of the '40s era was struck by the dust pouring into cabs and by the drivers "[who] would stand out on the running board, with the door closed, and reach in to steer the truck through the window." Hand throttles kept the vehicles careening along at a steady 40-miles-per.

Australia in the war years was a place where "scrounging" was far more than a joke or even an art form. For many, it was a way of life. The story is told, quite seriously, of the Aussie officer on leave who returned to his five-room house near Darwin one day in August of 1942. . .only to find it was gone!

Two months previous, in an epic of scrounging by parties unknown, an entire military camp—operations room, kitchens, showers, sleeping quarters, latrines—disappeared between a Saturday and a Monday. "No trace of the vanished camp was ever found," says Professor Alan Powell of the University College of the Northern Territory in his recent book, *The Shadow's Edge: Australia's Northern War* (International Specialized Book Services, Portland, Oregon).

Consider, too, the "fat cat" supply runs by air. Here the prevailing question was: Why waste empty space on aircraft returning to home base from training, administrative or supply flights? The useful answer was: If they must go home anyway, fill 'em up! Fill 'em up with beer, food or other luxury items that didn't seem likely to reach the camps in the great, so very distant, Outback.

Thus came about "the bombing of Adelaide," an episode attributed to a Liberator bomber carrying various items in its bomb bays—oranges, booze, Coca Cola and so on. As luck would have it, the bomb bay doors "peeled off" shortly after takeoff—and gravity took care of the rest. "Quite a sight it was to see case after case tumbling down, plus crates of oranges flying apart," recalled American Charles Edward of the 380th Bombardment Group.

Below, a crate of beer landed in Mrs. L.F. MacDonald's back yard and a Coke carton "demolished" the roof of her washhouse, says Powell's book. Oranges "showered down over the entire neighborhood." Amazingly, no one was hurt.

A B-24 Liberator pays a visit to the Japanese base at Salamaua, New Guinea. One of the bombers hit an unintended target in Adelaide, Australia, with unusual ordnance.

At the time not all such events seemed too humorous. This was, after all, war. . .real war. American P-40 fighter pilot Robert Oestreicher, apparently the first Allied pilot to down a Japanese plane over Australia, is a case in point. His 49th Fighter Group won a Presidential Unit Citation, with Oestreicher one of the few 49th "originals" to survive. In those early war days, too, he helped uncrate and assemble the P-40s as they arrived by ship; then, he and a fellow pilot performed the test flights. ("We made quite a few forced landings. . .because various things had not been hooked up.")

Also earning a Presidential Unit Citation was the 380th, which customarily flew lengthy missions over the Dutch East Indies, including the war's longest bombing raid before the advent of the B-29 "Super Fort." Operating the B-24 Liberator, the 380th lost 49 of its bombers in one year, and more than 260 men overall, before decamping from the Northern Territory. . .no longer the *vulnerable* Northern Territory exactly because of such sacrifices by Americans, Australians and their various allies in the *down under* part of the world.

C.B.K.

World War II

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Behind the "big names" in the Red Army were others who survived both purges and relentless warfare.

By Jon Guttman

Vassily Petrenko's military career was one always fraught with pressures—of growing command responsibilities, of Stalin's purges and, during World War II, of intense combat. General Vassily Yakovlevich Petrenko, no household word in the West, was one of those intermediate "lesser lights" whose leadership at the regimental and divisional level contributed to the overall success of the Soviet Army's famous field marshals. Steady, reliable, but relatively unknown. Every army has such mainstays.

Petrenko's military career began in 1929 when he volunteered for service in the Red Army at the age of 17. His local *Komsomol* (Young Communist League) sent him to the General Infantry Institute to become a military specialist—first at the sergeants' school, and then the officers' training school.

During the 1930s, Petrenko's promotions came at a modest rate, and he did not have a high position of responsibility. He was not "political" and concerned himself only with military affairs, factors that probably saved his life when Stalin began purging the Soviet officer corps in the late 1930s. Petrenko was overlooked while many of his comrades fell victim to the dictator's purges.

Pure luck may have figured in Petrenko's survival as well; a low profile by itself was no guarantee of safety. "A good friend of mine was destroyed simply because he was of German descent," Petrenko recalled in a recent interview. "There was, in fact, an entire republic on the Volga River, near Saratov, made up of Russians of German ancestry. Their capital was the city of Engels. In 1942-1944, Stalin ordered the complete liquidation of the 'Republic of Germans on the Volga.' Most of them were deported to Kazakhstan in Central Asia."

Infantry Colonel Vassily Petrenko (left) poses with one of his fellow officers after being awarded the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union for his part in the liberation of Kiev.

"Today," says Petrenko also, "much research is being done into the repression of the Stalin period. President Mikhail Gorbachev is not hiding anything now—we want to know everything, and to clean ourselves of that dirt. We are finding mass graves. There will be monuments constructed at those sites, and as many names will be recorded as we can establish."

As a survivor, Petrenko remembers the 1930s and 1940s as terrible years—years of passion and inhumanity: "Ideology poisoned the people—people ceased to be humans, and therefore could kill like machines. Stalin was but one of several manifestations of such a triumph of the ideological machine-man. And, beyond our borders, there were others. The ideology of Hitler's Germany took over the psychology of the age. The soldiers of the SS believed that they were of a higher race. Their enemies were not even human—Slavs, Gypsies, Jews could be killed without conscience."

Such was the environment in which Vassily Petrenko pursued his career as an officer. It took a threat like that posed by Hitler's Germany to distract Stalin from his mad purges—and to motivate Petrenko and so many of his comrades to fight as they did when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

In June 1942, Petrenko was a major commanding an infantry regiment sent to Voronezh on the Don River as part of the overall strategic plan to defend Stalingrad. There were several German allies operating in the Voronezh sector. On one occasion, for example, he encountered some POWs of the Spanish "Blue Division." There were also some Italians and Hungarians in the area. Petrenko regarded them as very poor soldiers in comparison with the Germans.

In January 1943, the Soviets went on the offensive at Voronezh and won a swift, crushing victory. The Hungarian Second Army collapsed, losing 70,000 men killed and having another 50,000 taken prisoner. As Petrenko's company advanced, he saw one group of Hungarians raise a white flag, and one of his soldiers directed them into captivity. They were more fortunate than others. At Kastorni Station, Petrenko saw at least 200 Hungarian soldiers who had been packed into a train car and machine-gunned by German troops for deserting their positions.

The victory at Voronezh created the Kursk salient—an arc of territory that the Germans, after halting Soviet advances at Kharkov in March 1943, resolved to eliminate. During the summer of 1943, Petrenko was in charge of an infantry

Continued on page 68

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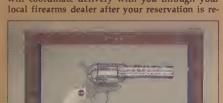

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H364

If FDR hadn't made his suggestion, 1,437 more men (and a woman) might not have survived Normandy.

By Truman R. Strobridge

On June 5, 1944, the largest armada ever assembled—almost 5,000 ships—was on its way with more than 500,000 Allied soldiers. The next morning, the most famous of all D-days, the assault troops landed on the heavily fortified beaches of Normandy. In the weeks following, millions more men would be ferried across the English Channel to reinforce those brave souls who first had seized and maintained a beachhead on the European continent.

Lost to view among so many vessels of all conceivable type were the 60 small wooden cutters of the U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Flotilla One, a unique humanitarian organization given the sole mission of saving lives during the invasion. "It never occurred to me," one of those saved remembered, "that people who had ships sunk under them during the enormous amphibious operation which secured the first beachheads on the coast of France would be specially provided for—until it happened to me."

As American troops board landing craft for the coming invasion of Normandy, almost lost in the background are the small but not insignificant cutters of U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Flotilla One.

The war correspondents, some of them also rescued by the 83-footers, fondly called them the "matchbox fleet." And these matchboxes saved 1,438 participants of the largest Allied amphibious landing of World War II. The small patrol craft ran the gauntlet of deadly shore batteries, strafing by airplanes, thickly strewn mine fields, naval gunfire and sometimes even friendly fire in their endless race to the aid of persons in distress. They took them aboard until the 83-footers almost swamped, carried the survivors to larger ships, and then returned to search for more.

The most likely dangers to the invasion fleet consisted of storms, submarines, "E" boats (fast torpedo boats), the *Luftwaffe*, enemy mine fields and underwater obstacles. Since this large invasion force had to operate on an intricate schedule, not one of the thousands of ships participating could afford to stop and pick up survivors.

Most of the Allied invasion planners had overlooked the idea of forming a rescue flotilla, despite the need being so self-evident in retrospect. To President Franklin D. Roosevelt belongs the credit for creating it. An enthusiastic yachtsman until crippled by polio and assistant secretary of the Navy during World War I, he knew from personal experience of the skills of U.S. Coast Guardsmen in handling their small craft. Just a few weeks prior to D-day, he suggested the provision of special rescue ships for the great armada.

Urgent secret orders went out to U.S. Coast Guard units from Maine to Cuba. Scores of 83-footers abandoned anti-submarine patrols that had earned them the nickname of "sub-busters" and began converging on Staten Island in the New York harbor. Here, they were loaded aboard fast cargo ships to be rushed across the Atlantic.

Upon their arrival in British ports, the U.S. Coast Guardsmen labored frantically to convert their armed 83-footers into rescue craft. British officers who had been on the rescue operation at Dunkirk four years earlier offered advice that aided the harried crewmen greatly. The crews first stripped the armaments and excess gear from the decks. Then, they rigged scramble nets fore and aft on both sides of the rescue cutters to enable soaked and weary survivors to climb on board. Next, they installed block and tackle on the iron davits to lift the more seriously wounded.

They worked against time, and all too often the crews had to improvise their rescue equipment. The last cutter assigned to the flotilla arrived only 60 hours prior to the Normandy assault.

The U.S. Coast Guardsmen received first-aid instructions each day. By D-day minus one, any one of them could set a broken bone, apply a tourniquet and give artificial respiration. The skippers, meanwhile, had familiarized themselves with the complicated invasion plan.

Being powered by gasoline engines, the cutters had large fuel tanks amidships that held several thousand gallons of high-test fuel. Even a .30-caliber rifle bullet could pierce the wooden hulls and the fuel tanks, turning the rescue craft into a blazing inferno.

The rescue cutters carried a small amount of California brandy for use in reviving the spirits of the chilled survivors. "It was packed in small, two-

Continued on page 14

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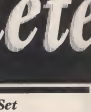

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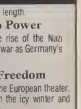

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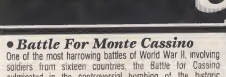

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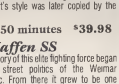

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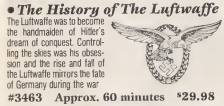

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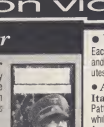

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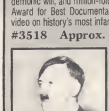

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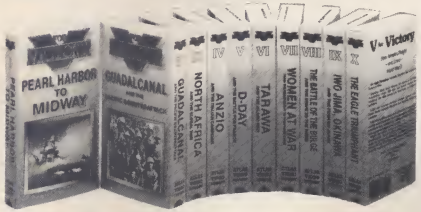

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Armament

Continued from page 10

ounce bottles," remembered the flotilla commander, Lt. Cmdr. Alexander Stewart, U.S. Coast Guard Reserve (USCGR), "and when divided among the 60 boats of the flotilla, the size of the spirited ration for each craft was conceivably less than the proverbial cask carried by the Saint Bernards of the Swiss passes. Needless to say, these few drops of concentrated 'sunshine' were expended during the first few hours of D-day."

The skippers gave pre-invasion briefings the night before the assault landing. The one given by Lt. j.g. Raymond M. Roenbloom, Jr., USCGR, commander of Rescue Cutter 16, probably was typical of the others. "We're going to have to be callous," he told his men. The rescue vessels could not take on board more survivors than they could safely carry. "When we get a load," he continued, "we're going to have to back away, no matter how many men are in the water, but as soon as we unload one batch of boys on a larger ship, we'll go back for another."

The invasion plans called for the flotilla to be divided equally, with 30 assigned to the British and Canadian and 30 to the American beaches.

Since the offshore danger point was expected to be the lineup of loaded assault transports, the majority of the rescue cutters remained close to them, with only five positioned between the large ships and the American beaches. Soon after the amphibious landing started, events demonstrated the falseness of this assumption. The German artillery, machine guns, mortars and small-arms fire created havoc among the many small craft, LCTs (Landing Craft, Tanks) and LCI(L)s (Landing Craft, Infantry [Large]) during their runs to the beaches. On all sides, the U.S. Coast Guardsmen saw swimmers floundering amid debris and oil slicks. The five close-in rescue cutters were soon frantically calling for assistance, and before long most of the 83-footers had ventured in close to the beaches.

The distinction of making the first rescue belongs to Ensign Bernard B. Wood, USCG, skipper of Coast Guard Cutter 1 (CGC-1). It took place mere minutes after H-hour and less than 2,000 yards from the German guns. A fairly high sea was running, and the water was bitterly cold. Most of the survivors were so weakened by both immersion and shock that the crewmembers had to go over the side and help them on board. Despite the shells bursting on all sides, Ensign Wood continued to cruise about, dodging skillfully out of the way of the onrushing as-

Continued on page 18

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Aviation pioneer Bernt Balchen proved his visions—and mettle—in war as well as peace.

By George A. Reynolds

Dropping arms and supplies to underground forces, parachuting spies and saboteurs into his Nazi-occupied nation, a "secret" airline that only flew in darkness or foul weather and completely ignored passenger comforts . . . these were just some elements of a World War II air operation directed by Norwegian-born aviation pioneer Bernt M. Balchen.

Born in a small Norwegian town on October 23, 1899, he believed even as a young man that all men are equal and entitled to self-determination. He joined Finland's ski patrol and cavalry to help that small country fight powerful Russian forces in a "war of imposition."

A Douglas C-47A of the type that took over for the emerald green B-24 bombers, modified as transports, that made up Bernt Balchen's phony "Carpetbagger" airline in Sweden in January 1945.

After recovering from a bayonet wound suffered in a death duel with a Russian cavalry officer, he returned to Norway and became a naval pilot in 1921. He served as a military pilot until the mid-1920s, when he left for Canada to be a test pilot for the fledgling Tony Fokker organization.

Balchen soon was earning a reputation that later would place him in Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame—soon, too, Admiral Richard E. Byrd selected him as chief pilot for the initial flight over the South Pole. For his invaluable contributions to this historic expedition in 1929, the U.S. House of Representatives awarded Balchen a special gold medal and American citizenship in 1930. Fortunately, too, he also received a commission in the U.S. Army Reserve.

From 1933 to 1935, Balchen served as chief pilot for the Lincoln Ellsworth Antarctic Expedition before returning to his native Norway to develop what eventually would become Scandinavian Airlines (SAS). During this same time he furthered aviation in other capacities as well—namely as consultant to Amelia Earhart for her daring, long-range flights. When war erupted in Europe in 1939, Bernt left Norway again and went to Singapore as a ferry pilot for Great Britain. From there he was called into active military service in 1940 with the U.S. Army.

As the war spread rapidly throughout the Continent in 1940, Maj. Gen. Henry ("Hap") Arnold, aware of Bernt Balchen's expertise with weather conditions and trends in the Arctic regions, summoned Captain Balchen more than three months before the United States entered the war and sent him to Greenland to establish a covert outpost on its western coast, under the code name Bluie West 8. From this outpost Balchen and his small detachment began a series of spectacular rescues of American airmen downed while ferrying aircraft and supplies to beleaguered Great Britain. They also sent continuous weather data and intelligence reports directly to Washington. Later they destroyed a small German air base on Greenland's eastern coast from which Nazi aircraft were attacking Allied planes on the North Atlantic Route and acting as spotters for U-boats deployed to attack ship convoys en route to Great Britain.

In conjunction with the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Balchen formed a vital air service as well. Its purpose was to rescue Allied, Swedish and Norwegian airmen reported down in the Greenland-Iceland regions and to ferry about various nationals who were engaged in highly sensitive matters. These top-secret flights would later prove to be the forerunner of an invaluable mission in Scandinavia far larger in scale.

During one of the clandestine flights in 1942, Bernt revealed to a friend and OSS colleague, Earl MacDonald, just how far ahead of his time he was. Balchen began a lecture on space travel—not simply about reaching outer space, but also a discussion of the economics, the material resources required and the human consequences.

Meanwhile, the U.S. 479th and 480th anti-submarine groups were disbanded in late 1942, with their personnel and B-24 "Liberator" bombers formed into the 801st Bombardment Group, eventually redesignated as the 492nd Bombardment Group of the 2nd Air Division, stationed in East Anglia. The mission was to drop propaganda leaflets, secret agents and vital supplies to Resistance fighters in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany itself. The B-24s were highly modified and coated with an anti-glare black paint to counteract searchlights at night.

Major Balchen became heavily involved in these covert operations through his specialty—unorthodox flight techniques. The missions were flown in unarmed aircraft, and being defenseless, he and his personnel always chose to fly in darkness or inclement weather that grounded other crews.

"Carpetbagger" became a code word for the initial phases of the clandestine espionage operations—the leaflets, agent drops and supply support. It remained the same in meaning until the war's end and was applied to several phases of the highly secret activity. Naturally, the 801st/492nd Group's personnel were called "Carpetbaggers."

Continued on page 62

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Armament

Continued from page 14

sault craft that had the right of way. Only after his rescue craft had picked up 47 American soldiers and British sailors did he head out to the large ships and safety.

CGC-2, commanded by Ensign O. Tinsley Meekings, USCGR, accomplished its first rescue approximately 300 yards off Omaha Beach. Making its way through a heavy surf that pounded past the underwater obstacles, the cutter picked up nine unconscious survivors of swamped amphibious trucks. The crewmembers promptly gave artificial respiration on the open deck, and revived the rescued men.

Lieutenant junior grade William J. Starret, USCG, captain of CGC-3, braved the continuous German fire to maneuver in close enough to rescue the crew of a disabled tank. He then took in tow several crippled landing craft loaded with essential personnel and materiel and got them close enough to the beach to permit them to off-load.

CGC-4, skippered by Lt. j.g. James F. Smith, USCG, performed a similar assistance. German fire disabled two amphibious vehicles loaded with much needed 3-inch fieldpieces. The crew of CGC-4 heaved a line and towed them into shallower water, permitting the landing of the howitzers despite the heavy enemy fire and a dangerously high surf. Over the next two hours, and operating within 500 to 1,000 yards of the beach, CGC-4 rescued 24 men from the surf and transported them to hospital ships.

The nearby CGC-5, skippered by Ensign S.G. Pattyson, USCG, quickly picked up 15 men from sinking amphibious craft just off Omaha Beach. By noon, it had picked up 34, most of them seriously wounded. The cutter's decks ran "red with blood this hectic morning," reported the flotilla commander.

The cutters also performed other valuable services. Panic had broken out among the troops and crewmen aboard the British steamer *Fort Pick* after a German bomb set it afire. Steering his CGC-8 at full speed through the thick smoke, Ensign Richard S. Peer, USCG, steamed close to the stricken vessel knowing it might explode at any minute. Using an electric megaphone, he "cajoled and entreated the crew, saying he would leave them unless they began to obey their skipper's orders." The rescue cutter, standing nearby to take off survivors if necessary, had a calming effect. After order had been restored aboard the steamer and the danger of explosion had passed, CGC-8 departed. Later, a high-ranking British officer officially stated that the crew of CGC-8 "showed great courage" and were "deserving of praise."

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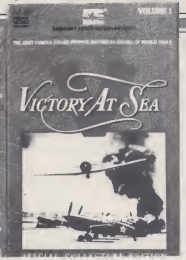

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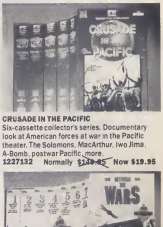

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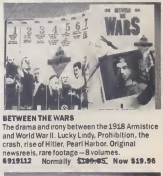

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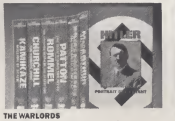

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The honor of making the most rescues on D-day went to CGC-16, commanded by Lt. j.g. R.V. McPhail, USCG, whose 83-footer picked up and carried 126 casualties and one fatality back to a hospital ship in less than six hours.

One rescue cutter experienced a unique episode that began to unfold while it was tied up to a hospital ship. A doctor who had come aboard to examine the casualties pointed at one man and said that he need not be placed on the hospital ship, since he was "beyond all possibility of recovery." One whole side of his abdomen was visibly ripped away by a shell. The crewmembers put him aside with the other dead soldiers and began a sea burial as soon as possible. The man who had been given up for dead raised his head during this ceremony and exclaimed: "If you guys think you are going to do that to me you've got another guess coming." As one of the crewmembers later recalled: "A half-hour later, chalk white but still alive and full of grit, this man was put aboard an LST especially equipped for handling hospital cases. Whether he survived or not is not known."

The crews of the cutters also picked many an Allied flyer from the chilly waters during the Normandy invasion. CGC-23, under the command of Ensign John N. Kellan, USCGR, braved the fire of shore batteries and patrol boats ringing the enemy-held Le Havre harbor to rescue the sole survivor of an Allied plane that had been forced to ditch there.

The only woman survivor was plucked out of cold waters by crewmembers of CGC-31, skippered by Lt. j.g. Burke I. Powers, USCG. A British hospital ship had hit a mine and then had sunk quickly. A British nurse was among the 99 survivors. Despite suffering from shock and immersion in the frigid waters, she lent a hand to the U.S. Coast Guardsmen in giving first aid to the wounded.

These rescue cutters continued to render their services after D-day. Primarily, they shepherded the transport and cargo ships carrying the reinforcements and supplies needed to expand the beachhead. Even as late as September 1944, these 83-footers were still picking up survivors of sinkings and air crashes from the cold, stormy waters of the English Channel—sometimes a hundred in a single day.

These then were the accomplishments of U.S. Coast Guard Rescue Flotilla One during the largest amphibious invasion of World War II. Although practically unknown by the general public, this unique rescue effort remains a proud page in the U.S. Coast Guard's history, a humanitarian mission undertaken (and succeeding) in the most intensive of combat. □

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City's Death Throes

Try as the mighty Red Army would, day after day, Breslau would not give in—even when it obviously was long past time for surrender.

By Patrick McTaggart

For almost 200 years—ever since the 18th-century Seven Years' War—the Silesian capital of Breslau had been a cornerstone in the defense plans of the Prussian and German empires, and now, near the end of World War II, came the city's real test.

In September 1944, Adolf Hitler issued an order that directed the city commandant to turn the area into a fortress. With Soviet forces closing in on the prewar borders of Germany, the *Führer* decided that outlying cities such as Breslau would be an important factor in holding the Red Army at bay.

A fortress commander had one duty—to make sure that his command fought the enemy to the last man and the last bullet. His family could be held responsible if he failed in his duty.

The beginning of 1945 found the Red Army ready to strike the final blow against Germany. On January 12, the Soviets began their offensive that would carry them to the gates of the Reichschancellory in Berlin itself. By the end of the day, the Vistula defense line had crumbled under the weight of Soviet tank and mechanized units.

The 11 armies of Marshal Ivan Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front were given the task of seizing southern Poland and Silesia. Within four days, Konev's forces had swept aside most of the defending units of the 4th Panzer Army. Columns of Soviet T-34s charged ahead of the infantry, hoping to reach Krakau and Czestochowa before the Germans could organize a proper defense of the area. The German general Heinz Guderian's blitzkrieg tactics had been studied by the Soviet armored commanders, who now used them with devastating results.

By January 18, Konev's spearheads were beyond Czestochowa and were headed for Breslau. Months before, when Hitler issued his fortress order, Breslau's *Gauleiter* (district leader) Karl Hanke had begun the process of transferring Hitler Youth and men too old for active duty into paramilitary fighting formations. The military commander, General Walter Krause, wanted to evacuate many of the city's civilians, but Hanke rejected the idea as being bad for morale.

On January 19, with Soviet tanks barely 50 miles from Breslau, Hanke finally consented to Krause's request. The next day, thousands of civilians started their journey to the west in a blinding snowstorm. The Soviets' high command inadvertently helped the evacuees when it ordered General Pyotr S. Rybalko's 3rd Guards Tank Army, whose primary mission had been to take Breslau, to turn south in an attempt to slice into the rear of the German Silesian defense forces. Hanke was given a few more precious days to reinforce his defenses and carry on the evacuation of non-combatants. Many of the civilians who could not or would not leave the city were pressed into construction units to build strongpoints within the old section of the town.

Four days later, Soviet armored units reached the bank of the Oder River south of Breslau. General K.A. Koroteyev's 52nd Army continued to advance on the city from the east, but hastily formed German defense units slowed the Russians considerably. Konev sent word to his Sixth Army to advance as soon as possible and help the 52nd break through the German lines. By the 24th, Russian artillery units were less than 30 miles east of Breslau.

Weakened German divisions of the 4th Panzer Army desperately tried to slow the Soviet 4th Tank Army's drive to the Oder north of the city, but by January 26, the Germans were forced to surrender the eastern bank of the river. The only German-held land east of the Oder was a bridgehead at Breslau, but, as advance units of the Sixth Army started to arrive, the German commander of the bridgehead began making plans for a withdrawal from that perilous position, too.

Gauleiter Hanke worked frantically with military and party officials to bolster his defenses. On February 1, *Generalmajor* Hans von Ahlfen took over as commander of Fortress Breslau. The local SA (Brown Shirt) commander, *SA Obergruppenführer* Otto Herzog, formed the old men and boys into *Volkssturm* battalions of 400. Ad hoc military regiments, bearing the names of their commanders, were also being formed.

As Soviet forces surrounded Breslau, Heinkel He-111 bombers such as the one in the foreground joined Junkers Ju-52 transports (background) in airlifting food and weapons to the city through a deadly curtain of anti-aircraft fire.

The following day, February 2, Soviet forces gained footholds on the western bank of the Oder north and south of the city. The German bridgehead east of Breslau was evacuated before fresh divisions of the Russian Sixth Army.

Throughout the first half of February, Russian units moved ever closer to completing the total encirclement of the Silesian capital. Detachments of Hitler Youth, armed with *Panzerfausts* (bazookas), helped to slow the Soviet advance considerably when they destroyed 76 enemy armored vehicles in a three-day period. An SS detachment under Georg Besslein also helped delay the inevitable when it wiped out a Soviet bridgehead close to the city on February 8.

Breslau's anti-tank capabilities received a welcome boost when an assault gun detachment, led by *Oberwachtmeister* (sergeant major) Leo Hartmann, found its way to the city with six assault guns and some other miscellaneous vehicles. These, together with numerous stationary guns that had been shipped into the city, formed a dangerous obstacle for the Russian armor and infantry that were approaching.

The Soviet pincers finally closed around Breslau on February 16. Konev, anxious for his tank armies to continue westward, ordered the Sixth Army to take the city. Three Soviet divisions were lined up facing von Ahlfen's southern defenses, while the northern, western and eastern sectors each had one division facing them. More divisions of the Soviets' Sixth Army were on the way. In all, a total of 150,000 Russian soldiers were ready to take part in the assault. Inside the city, 116,000 civilians waited for the terror to begin.

Von Ahlfen had to rely upon a mixture of regular troops and hastily trained conscripts to defend the Silesian capital. His armored vehicles consisted of seven tanks and eight assault guns, while 200 artillery pieces of various calibers provided his infantry with fire support. In all, 36 *Volkssturm* and two Hitler Youth battalions manned the defense line, along with shattered units of the 609th Infantry Division. The most strategic positions were held by ad hoc regiments under their commander names—Besslein, Mohr, Saur, Hanf and others. In total, Breslau could boast approximately 46,000 defenders.

With ground supply lines to Breslau severed, the *Luftwaffe* began shuttling supplies by air. Despite heavy Russian anti-aircraft fire, aged Ju-52 transport planes, along with He-111 bombers, continued to supply Breslau with food and weapons.

General V.A. Gluzdovsky, the Sixth Army commander, decided to attack immediately instead of waiting for the rest of his army to arrive, with the airfield at Gandau one of his primary objectives. Soviet tanks and infantry found it very difficult to hammer their way through the German defenses, even though the Reds held an overwhelming superiority in artillery and air support. Each block had to be cleared before moving on, and the cost was very high. Time and again, German counterattacks stopped the Russian attack in its tracks.

On February 20, with more units arriving, Sixth Army launched an all-out attack on the southern sector. A counter-attack across an open area by a Hitler Youth battalion under the command of a *Hauptmann* (captain) Seiffert was met head-on by machine-gun and mortar fire from a Soviet shock unit. Retreating in disorder, Seiffert left more than 100 of his Hitler Youth lying dead.

Other such attempts ended in the same way. It was finally decided to leave the counterattacking to experienced units, while the ill-equipped *Volkssturm* and Hitler Youth would fight in static defensive positions.

As the Russians slowly advanced, too, the defenders took to the sewers. They popped up behind the Soviet infantry and inflicted heavy casualties before disappearing beneath the streets. Although the Russians on this side of the city used incendiaries and artillery to raze entire blocks of the city, they succeeded in advancing only two kilometers by February 22.

When Soviet forces entered Breslau itself, the fighting took on the character of the 1942 battle for Stalingrad, with roles reversed. For many weeks of intense fighting, each successive Soviet offensive could measure its progress in city blocks.

The Soviet attack on Breslau's western flank met with even less success as Russian tanks and infantry were thrown back by withering fire from the men of Besslein's SS regiment.

Furious over his failure to make substantial headway, Sixth Army commander Gluzdovsky renewed his attack on the Gandau airfield. Both sides fought savagely, but in the end, Russian firepower forced the Germans to retreat.

The loss of the airfield on the 23rd did not end the *Luftwaffe* supply flights. Trees on the Kaiserstrasse, one of Breslau's main thoroughfares, were cut down, and the street was turned into a 1,300-meter runway.

On February 25, the 1st Battalion of the 26th Parachute Regiment, under a *Hauptmann* Trotz, landed on the makeshift airstrip and was immediately assigned key positions to defend. The Russians were shocked to find battle-hardened paratroopers facing them, instead of the old men and boys that they had been told were defending these areas.

During the last days of February, Gluzdovsky's forces increased their attacks on the southern and eastern sectors. Soviet bombers, aided by heavy artillery fire, pulverized entire blocks of the city in an effort to panic the population. Russian shock troops advanced block by block, but the cost remained heavy. Hartmann's assault guns ambushed several Russian tanks in the rubble-strewn streets. Sniper fire forced the accompanying Soviet infantry to be doubly cautious.

Gluzdovsky had another problem facing him. The Germans had several remote-controlled "Goliath" mini-tanks at their disposal. Six feet long, 22 inches wide, and 26 inches high, the Goliath was capable of carrying a 200-pound explosive charge. Several key bridges were destroyed by these robot tanks as the Russians pushed deeper into the city. Some forward units were even cut off and annihilated because a Goliath had blown up their only means of escape when German units counterattacked.

By March 1, though, the fighting was nearing the approaches to the inner city. The Russians soon found out which sectors were manned by inexperienced *Volkssturm* units, and which ones were held by regular army, SS, or paratroop formations. In particular, the Soviets tried to avoid attacking areas held by Besslein's SS men. Both the armored and infantry attacks on that sector decreased dramatically as the Russians searched for an easier way into the city.

The Soviet advance slowly ground to a halt when it reached the reinforced positions of Breslau's inner defense ring. Artillery emplacements and pillboxes dotted the streets of the ancient city. Many of the canals running to the Oder provided perfect anti-tank ditches, and these natural obstacles were quickly reinforced with anti-tank guns and machine-gun nests.

On March 3, *Gauleiter* Hanke made an impassioned speech from Fortress Breslau that was transmitted throughout the Reich. He vowed that the city would never surrender under any conditions. In Berlin, propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels noted in his diary that "It (the speech) was movingly impressive. . . . If all our *Gauleiters* were like this and acted like Hanke, we should be in better shape than we are."

Hanke's speech may have impressed Goebbels, but it infuriated the Russians. The next day they launched concentrated attacks against both the northern and southern sectors of Breslau. Still, most of the Soviet ground attacks ended in failure in front of the well-entrenched defenders.

The *Luftwaffe* was still making flights into the besieged city despite heavy losses. On March 5, another battalion of paratroops landed, along with ammunition and other supplies. On their return flight, the Ju-52s carried severely wounded soldiers and civilians to safer areas of the Reich.

Seeing that his frontal assaults were ineffective, Gluzdovsky gave his ground troops a few days' time to regroup before proceeding with the attack. The Red Air Force, however, was

A Hitlerjugend mans a Panzerfaust anti-tank weapon. Motivated as much by defending their homes as by Nazi propaganda, the youth of Breslau helped slow the Soviet advance by destroying 76 Soviet tanks in three days.

very active over the skies of Breslau. On March 6, Goebbels noted in his diary that "very heavy air activity in the East was directed primarily against Breslau, which was bombed by some 1,200 Soviet aircraft attacking in waves."

Bombs were still falling three days later when *General der Infanterie* Hermann Niehoff, who had flown into Breslau a few days earlier, officially replaced von Ahlfen as fortress commander. Niehoff, an experienced Eastern Front commander, immediately set about strengthening his shrinking defense lines. He ordered local counterattacks by Regiments Mohr, Besslein and Wehl to recapture a few of the lost positions, which they did.

Between their side's air raids, meanwhile, Soviet tanks and infantry tried to advance, hoping that the Germans would be too dazed by the bombings to man an effective defense. The attacks on the northern sector were easily repulsed, but in the south, bitter fighting took a heavy toll on both sides. The ferocity of the battle appalled even the most hardened combat veterans. From February 26 to March 10, Mohr's regiment destroyed more than 100 Russian guns and tanks on the southern sector. *Oberwachtmeister* Hartmann's assault guns also made a number of kills.

On March 11, a peculiar calm fell over the city. The exhausted troops of both sides spent the next few days trying to get some sleep and regain some of their strength. A few bombs were dropped by Russian bombers and the *Luftwaffe* continued to bring in supplies and ammunition, but there was very little movement on the ground. The lull lasted until March 15.

Gluzdovsky was under increasing pressure from Marshal Konev to finish off Breslau as quickly as possible. The main Soviet front was far beyond the Silesian capital, and the Sixth Army was needed for the final thrust into Germany.

On March 15, Soviet artillery began a massive bombardment of the center of the city. Wave after wave of assault troops attacked from every direction. As the focus of the attack shifted from one sector to the next, Niehoff juggled his meager reserves as best he could, sending them to plug any gaps that were created by Russian breakthroughs. House-to-house fighting, reminiscent of Stalingrad, gradually stalled the Russians once again.

Several of Breslau's artillery units played an important role in stopping the enemy. One particular formation, "*Artilleriegruppe Nord*," was composed of four batteries of German guns, and one battery each of Polish and Italian field-pieces. This unit, situated in the northern part of the city, was responsible for breaking up several Soviet attacks during the first half of March.

Heavy fighting continued for another week. The constant air and artillery bombardment had broken most of the city's water mains, and entire blocks burned out of control as German and Russian soldiers stalked each other through smoke-filled streets. The city was dying, but *Gauleiter* Hanke was determined that there would be no surrender.

Six Gotha-242 and DFS-230 transport planes attempted to land on the makeshift Kaiserstrasse runway on March 23. Three were shot down by Russian flak, but the remaining three landed safely, with their howitzers and 150mm ammunition for the garrison.

The last week of March saw the siege reach new heights of intensity. Russian shock troops, supported by engineer units, succeeded in capturing several city blocks. German counterattacks recaptured a few of them, but Soviet materiel superiority was making itself felt.

The Germans fought back with whatever was on hand. At one critical point in the line, known as the Hitler Youth "corner," some ingenious 12- and 13-year-olds built a hand-grenade catapult that hurled grenades at Soviet troops who were well out of normal throwing range.

The factories that could still function were turning out weapons and ammunition, which were sent to a front line that was often only five or six blocks away. Female Hitler Youth (Hitler Maidens) were pressed into service as couriers and as supply handlers.

The war over burned-out buildings was reduced to man-to-man fighting. In one sector, held by Besslein's SS regiment, a company under the command of 24-year-old *Obersturmführer*

Civilian refugees began evacuating Breslau on January 20, 1945, in a blinding snowstorm. Those who could not or would not leave the city were pressed into service as laborers, assisting in the erection of defensive strongpoints.

(first lieutenant) Franz Budka occupied several cellars beneath burning buildings. In temperatures of 120-140 degrees Fahrenheit, Budka and his men repulsed several Russians attempts to take the area. Their tenacity prevented what could have been a major Soviet breakthrough.

On Easter Saturday, March 31, Konev and Gluzdovsky decided that the time had come to put an end to the Breslau problem. A combined air and artillery bombardment, designed to obliterate the defenders, rained tons of explosives on the city. Soviet infantry and tanks burst through the dazed Germans in the eastern sector, capturing a mile of new territory before being stopped by Hartmann's assault guns and Herzog's *Volkssturm*.

Mohr's regiment, along with a battalion under the command of Major Günther Tenschert, was hastily shifted to reinforce the crumbling line. The Soviet attack was renewed on Easter Sunday, resulting in the loss of a few more blocks. For the most part, however, Breslau's defenses still kept the Soviets from celebrating an Easter victory.

Encouraged though, Gluzsdovsky kept the pressure on. During the next week, Soviet forces launched attacks on several key positions. A combined air and ground assault slowly pushed the defenders back block by block. Resistance stiffened as the Russians neared the inner city and, as their own losses mounted, the Soviets finally began to slow down once again.

Since the fighting on Easter Saturday started, *Oberwachtmeister* Hartmann and his assault gun detachment had remained almost constantly on the move. A partial first-person account of Hartmann's actions says: "March 31st—one T-34 and numerous enemy advance positions destroyed. . . . April 1st—one 152mm assault gun and one tank destroyed. . . April 2nd—two enemy assault guns destroyed. . . April 3rd—three anti-tank guns destroyed. . . April 4th—one tank, one anti-tank gun destroyed." No matter how many enemy vehicles Hartmann and his unit destroyed, there always seemed to be new ones to take their place.

As the noose tightened around Breslau, the *Luftwaffe* found it more and more difficult to land on the Kaiserstrasse. Rubble covered the area, and it was finally decided that supplies would have to be dropped instead of unloaded on the ground. Because of the fluid condition of the front, the Russians sometimes received unexpected rations of chocolate and schnapps originally destined for Breslau's hopeless defenders.

General Niehoff knew that the time was coming for tough decisions to be made. He had been approached by city officials on different occasions asking him to surrender to the Russians, but the old general could not bring himself to disobey Berlin. Hanke, despite his brave words to the citizens of Breslau, must have also recognized that time was running out. Even Goebbels wrote: "He (Hanke) regards the situation as extraordinarily critical. He does not know how much longer he can hold out. . . .In Breslau the enemy has attacked very heavily from all sides but in general (it) was held. Nevertheless one must now begin to ask oneself the question how long this can go on."

The civilians of Breslau, reduced to living in cellars or in the streets, also wondered. Stories of Russian atrocities kept many from speaking out, but others openly called for a stop to the fighting. Hanke tried to put an end to such talk by issuing a decree that authorized the summary shooting of shirkers and rumor mongers, without trial. Niehoff and his subordinates did not obey the decree. There were more than enough Russians to be killed without shooting the very people they were trying to defend.

Rising casualties among the experienced German troops helped the Russians gain new ground. Major Tenschert's battalion was down to 50 percent strength by mid-April, and Mohr's regiment would eventually lose 75 percent of its men. More Hitler Youth and *Volkssturm* units were forced to man critical sectors as the battle progressed. They gave a surprisingly good account of themselves, but in the end, they were no match for combat-tested Red Army soldiers.

German prisoners are rounded up at the outskirts of Breslau in March 1945, but the end is nearly two months away. Breslau formally surrendered on May 6 after a grueling 70-day siege. Berlin had fallen in only nine days.

The reduced lines of the defenders did help when reinforcements were needed to stop a Soviet penetration. Besslein and Mohr also allocated some of their veterans to the *Volkssturm* and Hitler Youth in order to give them a fighting chance.

Newly promoted *Leutnant* Leo Hartmann kept his men ready for action at a moment's notice. Although his assault-gun unit had been reduced to three vehicles, Hartmann and his men still made an important contribution. On April 18, his unit destroyed 13 Soviet tanks and five self-propelled howitzers that had broken through a *Volkssturm* position.

On Hitler's birthday, April 20, General Niehoff personally distributed chocolate to the women and children of the fortress. The Russians celebrated the occasion by launching yet another major assault on Breslau's southern sector. They hammered away at Mohr's and Besslein's troops for eight straight days, forcing the Germans to give up several key positions. Pouring fresh troops into the battle, Gluzdovsky managed to take about one-fifth of the German-held territory before his men ran out of steam.

On May 1, seven Ju-52s dropped supplies to the garrison, and two Fieseler Fi-156 *Storch* reconnaissance planes landed with some of the more fragile equipment. They were the last German aircraft to land in Breslau until the end of the war.

May 2 brought news of the surrender of Berlin to the defenders of Breslau. General Niehoff radioed the commander of Army Group Center, *Feldmarschal* Ferdinand Schörner, requesting that he be allowed to surrender the city in the interest of humanity. Schörner refused to allow it, and more men, women and children died needlessly as the battle reached its climax.

Breslau resident Emil Heinze wrote: "On Thursday (May 3) night, we were all called. The only time we could work now was at night. We started building machine-gun emplacements. The sky over the front was scarlet, as street after street caught fire."

An assembly of clergymen visited Niehoff on May 4, begging him to disobey orders and capitulate. The general agreed that further resistance was hopeless, and he ordered that negotiations with the Russian commander begin immediately. Gluzdovsky accepted Niehoff's request for a cease-fire, and by the following morning surrender conditions were being finalized. The next day, May 6, Niehoff signed the surrender document.

Gauleiter Hanke did not wait for the city to surrender. He flew out of the city in a Fieseler *Storch* and vanished, leaving his people to fend for themselves. *Obergruppenführer* Herzog, the SA commander, was killed trying to break through the Russian lines. SS *Leutnant* Budka suffered the same fate. The others, including General Niehoff, were kept in Soviet POW camps for several years. Niehoff was not released from solitary confinement until 1955.

During the course of the battle, the German troops suffered 6,000 dead and 23,000 wounded. More than 20,000 civilians died. The *Luftwaffe* paid a heavy price to keep the city supplied. Although it succeeded in flying out 5,225 wounded soldiers, 165 planes were lost during the siege.

Russian casualties were placed at a costly 60,000 dead and wounded.

The defense of Breslau was one of the few instances where Hitler's "Fortress Order" accomplished what it was meant to. The three corps of Gluzdovsky's Sixth Army were held off for 70 days by the defenders. In contrast, Berlin held out for only nine. Silesia is now part of Poland, and the city has been renamed Wroctaw. □

Patrick McTaggart writes from Elkader, Iowa, but he collects much of his material from still-surviving veterans of the Eastern Front of World War II. Further reading should include Russia At War, 1941-1945, *by Alexander Werth; and* The Other Side of the Hill, *by B.H. Liddell Hart.*

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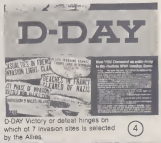

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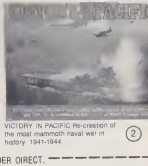

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Crewmen take to their stations in 2/3rd Australian Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, *by Richard Ashton. In 1942, Japanese air raids lent urgency to their vigilance, while Japanese landings on the island of Timor threatened northern Australia itself with the possibility of imminent invasion.*

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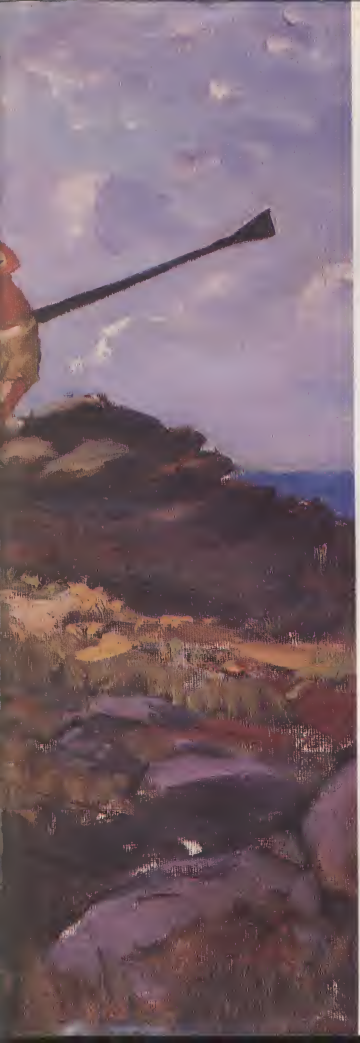

Behind Enemy Lines

As Australia's commandos, men of the "independent companies" mounted a guerrilla campaign against the Japanese occupying Timor. . .for a while.

By John Brown

Early in World War II, the first suggestion that Australia should raise commando units came from Britain, where the concept of commando raiders was already being put into practice. It was accepted, and in October 1940 British Commando Captains Mike Calvert and Spencer Chapman arrived in Australia to begin training. . .not commandos *per se*, but what the Australians preferred to call "independent companies." The training began just in time for the struggle in defense of the Aussie homeland.

Sixty volunteer officers and non-commissioned officers from the Australian military forces were given six weeks intensive training in demolition, booby traps, fieldcraft, weapons-handling and radio-signaling. These then trained enough other volunteers to form an independent company of 327 officers and men. Training continued, but now it was on the theory that the Aussie commandos probably would operate as guerrillas in enemy-occupied country. Grueling endurance conditioning was accompanied by training in how to live off the land, how to "read" the night sky, and how to get from Point A to Point B, day or night, in any kind of country. The select personnel memorized routes, studied possible means of escaping if captured, and learned how to blow up anything and everything. They were constantly drilled in the importance of securing the cooperation of local people, without which their effectiveness in enemy-occupied territory would be greatly diminished.

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After nearly nine months of guerrilla warfare, troops of the 2/2nd Independent Company make their way to their evacuation points in December 1942, after having been relieved by the 2/4th Independent Company in September.

Pearl Harbor. In addition to the 2/2nd Independent Company, Sparrow Force consisted of the Australian 2/40th Infantry Battalion, a few small ancillary units and 500 Dutch-officered Indonesian troops of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (RNEIA), for a total of 2,000 officers and men.

The 2/2nd's new home was a mountainous island. Only 300 miles long by up to 60 miles wide, with a population of some 900,000, it was divided roughly between the two colonial governments, with Dutch Timor and its capital of Koepang to the west and Portuguese Timor (capital Dili) to the east. Timor would be a threat to northern Australia if it fell into Japanese hands. Dili, with its two-runway airfield capable of handling fighters and bombers, was only 400 miles from Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory. Further, both Dili and Koepang had good harbors.

On December 17, Major A. Spence, in command of the independent company, took half the company and, with 260 RNEIA troops under the command of Lt. Col. L. van Straaten, sailed along the coast of Timor to Dili. But the Portuguese governor insisted that no Australian or Dutch forces should land on neutral Portuguese territory.

They landed anyway, and although the atmosphere was tense they were not opposed. The RNEIA troops occupied the town, and the Aussie commandos took over the airfield 1½ miles west along the coast. A few days later the rest of the independent company arrived, with a headquarters established in the hills behind Dili, and the commandos began familiarizing themselves with the country.

Very soon, however, the Australians began to fall victim to local diseases such as malaria, dysentery, scabies, tropical ulcers and worms. Malaria was particularly devastating, with up to 70 severe cases under treatment at any one time, but spurred on by reports of the Japanese blitzkrieg heading their way, the Aussie troops adopted the tactic of resting during actual malaria attacks, usually an hour or so each day, and ignoring the disease for the rest of the time.

One thing they learned very quickly was that it was almost impossible to move in the country without being seen by Timorese in the villages, hamlets and huts that dotted the hillsides and valleys. So they built up their friendships among the native pople and made village chiefs responsible for the supplies and equipment cached at small bases and positions in the rear of headquarters. The Australians also found a way of increasing their own mobility—each commando employed a Timorese servant, a *criado*, who followed him everywhere, carrying equipment and personal gear. In time of danger or action, as time went on, the *criado* would disappear into the bush, leaving the commando with only his weapons and ammunition, and when the danger was past or the action over, he would reappear with the commando's gear. Later, the Australians supplemented the native help with the purchase of small Timorese ponies for use as pack animals.

On February 19, 1942, Japanese aircraft attacked Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory, destroying the military and naval facilities. That same night, Japanese warships bombarded Koepang and Dili and Japanese troops began landing.

In Dutch Timor 23,000 troops were put ashore with tanks and artillery—600 paratroopers were dropped behind Koepang to cut off the anticipated withdrawal of Australian and RNEIA troops along the only road to the interior. After four days of bitter fighting (it was later established that only 78 of the 600 Japanese paratroopers survived) the remains of Sparrow Force, at the end of their ammunition and supplies, were called on to surrender. Some men did, but many others took to the hills, intending to join the commandos and RNEIA in adjoining Portuguese Timor.

Although only 300 miles long and 60 miles wide, Timor offered the Australian commandos ideal terrain for conducting a guerrilla campaign. Sympathetic Timorese also helped, until Japanese propaganda began to turn their loyalties.

In Portuguese Timor, with Dili also under bombardment the night of the 19th, van Straaten decided to abandon the town and withdraw with his RNEIA troops to Dutch Timor. That same night, with the road from Dili to the airfield defended by a 21-man section of commandos under Lieutenant Gerry McKenzie, two of the commandos heard strange voices singing—and out of the darkness a party of Japanese soldiers came marching along the road. The amazed commandos swept them with their Bren light machine guns at very close range, littering the road with dead and wounded. Recovering from their surprise, the Japanese attacked the two commandos with grenades, eventually killing them both, and then, with reinforcements, continued their march on the airfield.

At the airfield gates more of the commandos stopped them with Brens and Thompson submachine guns, while McKenzie tried to raise Dili by telephone. He was unable to do so, but the section's messenger, an enlisted man named Doyle, picked up the lieutenant's scribbled notes, mounted an old Dutch bicycle and peddled out through the gates where the Japanese were massing for an attack. They were so surprised that he rode through without a shot being fired at him. And in Dili he found Captain Bernard Callinan, second-in-command of the independent company, gave him the notes and reported on the precarious situation at the airfield. He then set off for the airfield on his bicycle again, but this time he wasn't so lucky. At the entrance to the airfield, where fighting was heavy, the bicycle was shot from under him. Still, he managed to escape in the darkness with only bruises.

For the rest of the night the commandos fought off repeated assaults and attempts to infiltrate the airfield. Among many small actions, Corporal Kevin Curran killed five Japanese, including an officer, with his bayonet as they tried to cross a footbridge on the edge of the airfield. A pair of privates, named Paynton and Thomas, distinguished themselves as "close-quarter Tommy-gunners." When dawn came and the Japanese realized how small was the force holding the airfield, they massed for what could only be the final attack. But McKenzie acted first—he sent three Tommy-gunners into the attack while the rest of his men blew up the airfield. Then they withdrew, every man for himself, through the Japanese lines to meet up at a prearranged rendezvous.

When the independent company personnel assembled in the hills later, the situation was assessed. They estimated that 6,000 Japanese had landed close to Dili. The last message they had had from Darwin was on the 19th of February, when the northern town was under air attack—having no radio, the men isolated on Timor wondered if the attack had been followed by landings on Australia's north coast.

They were also out of contact with Koepang on Timor itself. They decided the only thing to do was find out what had happened to the rest of Sparrow Force and to carry on the kind of guerrilla war for with they had been trained.

Patrols went out to re-establish contact with the Portuguese and Timorese, to set up new bases and to find out what the Japanese were doing. Captain Callinan with a few commandos made for the border—in Dutch Timor they soon learned of the end of Sparrow Force and spread word that their independent company was operational in Portuguese Timor. Any Australian or RNEIA survivors should join them there. They then returned with some survivors they had been able to collect. Meanwhile, Brigadier W.C.D. Veale, commander of Sparrow Force, with a few of his troops had managed to escape the Japanese and reach Portuguese Timor, where they had been picked up by a commando patrol.

On March 9, the commandos heard that the Netherlands East Indies had surrendered to the Japanese. By then, some

240 Australian soldiers from Sparrow Force, most of them wounded or sick, were in Portuguese Timor. It was decided in conference that the Australian infantry and the RNEIA troops under the command of van Straaten would guard the border against attack from Dutch Timor, while the independent company would concentrate on attacking the Japanese in Portuguese Timor wherever and however it could.

On March 13, the Japanese took David Ross, the Australian-born British consul at Dili, into the hills and turned him loose with orders to find the Australians and seek their surrender—if they didn't surrender, they would be declared outlaws and would be executed when captured. Ross delivered the message. He also signed an official document for each commando officer stating that any orders signed by that officer for food, commodities or services to the commandos would be paid for by the British or Australian governments. He gave them all the information he had on the Japanese and then, since he was under oath to return, went back to Dili with the commandos' answer—there would be no surrender.

The Japanese began occupying townships, villages and Portuguese administrative posts out from Dili. The Aussies, meanwhile, tried to radio home for instructions using a priority reserved for commanders-in-chief of the Australian services, and were elated to hear all stations closed down while their transmitter was concentrated upon. After some doubt, they were accepted by Darwin, where it had been believed that all of Sparrow Force were dead or captives of the Japanese. The commandos asked for medical supplies and new batteries, and these were air-dropped to them a few days later.

The Japanese had now settled in at Dili and Ermera. The commandos moved in closer, forming an arc from the outskirts of Dili to Ermera, and set about doing as much damage as possible. They hoped to draw the Japanese out by blowing up bridges and sections of the road between the two towns and shooting up construction parties, convoys and reinforcements. Also typical of other harassment at the time were "ops" by single commandos who would darken their already sunbrowned skin, put on a native sarong and wander into a village looking for a small party of Japanese. When the circumstances were favorable, he would unwrap a Tommy gun, shoot up the Japanese and make his escape.

Another typical action came the time three commandos hid within a hundred yards of a Japanese observation post for two days while they checked the routine, and then struck at breakfast time on the third day, killed 12 Japanese and disappeared into the scrub. A larger raid was carried out one night by Captain G.G. "Bull" Laidlaw and 20 commandos who made their way into Dili itself. As they were passing a machine-gun post in the darkness, one of the enemy gun crew spoke conversationally to Laidlaw. Unable to answer him in Japanese, Laidlaw shot him. The commandos then shot out the machine-gun post and opened up on the buildings on all sides, shooting into the Japanese who poured from them. When the Japanese began to organize themselves, the commandos made their way to the beach and out of town.

Attacks and raids on the Japanese were deliberately kept small-scale on the theory that it was better to kill a few Japanese at a time without loss to themselves—one dead commando was a serious loss to such a small force spread so thinly; a wounded commando would be a heavy burden on his comrades. But the Japanese, with their casualties mounting, placed rewards on the heads of the com-

Leaving Timor Was Difficult

The first attempted physical delivery of one set of Aussie "commandos" and the extraction of another from the Japanese-held island of Timor was an operation quite predictably fraught with difficulty and, as it turned out, with disaster.

Until late 1942, the Australian Navy had been the steadiest supplier for the independent company fighting a guerrilla war on Timor. Purely on makeshift basis, the navy had been running small vessels into Betano Bay on Timor's south coast for surreptitious, nighttime supply drops. So small were some of the vessels used that the first so employed was the patrol craft *Karu*—wooden, about 60 feet, nine knots top speed.

Despite her obvious physical handicaps, *Karu* successfully made six of the supply runs without harm. She was followed in the tricky task by larger, more modern vessels . . . but none was a real fighting ship of any significant size. The largest apparently was a corvette, the *Kalgoorlie*.

For the proposed switch in independent companies on Timor, however, a tougher, speedier and much larger ship would be needed. The job fell to the Australian destroyer *Voyager*, Lt. Cmdr. R.C. Robison commanding. *Voyager* was to land about 400 men and evacuate 600 . . . but not all at one time. Her first (and only) sortie to Betano Bay came on September 23, with 250 commandos on board.

The off-loading in the dark, incompletely charted bay was going well until the *Voyager* began drifting toward shore, pushed by wind and tidal action. The only way to avoid grounding would be to swing the ship's stern into deep water, while moving astern under the power of a port engine thrust, but that meant endangering the disembarking troops, their barges just above the ship's screws.

Robison chose *not* to endanger the soldiers, some of whom surely would have been sliced up by the propeller blades. He and his crew tried shouting orders for them to clear away, but they either didn't hear or they didn't pay attention . . . whatever the reason, they didn't move away from the ship's side.

In short order, Robison's truly precious destroyer was aground on the beach at Japanese-occupied Timor. "A night and day of frantic effort failed to get her off," reports Alan Powell in his 1988 book, *The Shadow's Edge: Australia's Northern War* (distributed by I.S.B.S., 5602 N.E. Hassalo St., Portland, Oregon 87213).

At 1:30 p.m. the next day, September 24, the Japanese found the stranded Aussie destroyer—the discovery was made by a lone bomber. It attacked, and the *Voyager's* guns shot it down. Still, the Japanese were now alerted, and it was only a matter of time before they arrived on the scene in force. Robison blew up his ship and took to the hills with his sailors and the Aussie commandos, as the apparently prudent course under the circumstances.

But only temporarily . . . acting swiftly, the Australians sent in two corvettes the very next night, September 25. They rescued the *Voyager* crew without incident (all but one man) and returned safely to Darwin.

Then came the next attempt to relieve the commandos of 2/2nd Independent Company, along with anxious Portuguese refugees. Patrol boat *Karu* and corvettes *Castlemaine* and *Armidale* were dispatched in late November and early December, but the outcome was mixed at best. *Karu* took off some of the refugees, but the two corvettes had to break off their approach while under Japanese attack. *Armidale* was lost, *Karu* sneaked home and *Castlemaine* also made port safely. For those still left on Timor—and the Australian armed forces generally—the war went on without any immediate relief.

J.B.

mandos and brought in an anti-guerrilla expert from Malaya to deal with them, a major the commandos quickly dubbed the "Singapore Tiger." On his first encounter with the Aussies, he fell into an ambush and was killed along with 25 others.

At the end of May, a PBY Catalina flying boat filled with supplies came in from Darwin, and Veale, van Straaten and some of the more severely wounded Australians were evacuated on it. Major Spence, commander of the 2/2nd Independent Company, was promoted to lieutenant colonel and placed in command of Sparrow Force; his second-in-command, Captain Callinan, was promoted to major, in command of the independent company. During the next month, the Japanese withdrew from their forward base at Ermera to Dili as more troops arrived at the Portuguese capital. With Japanese reinforcements also arriving in Dutch Timor for an offensive, the commandos stepped up their raids around Dili, mining the roads around the town and blowing up embankments and culverts to form road blocks.

But now also a change was noted in the attitude of the Timorese people. Where they once had been helpful, now they were unfriendly and at times actively threatening. The Japanese propaganda campaign against the commandos and against Portuguese authority was beginning to take effect.

In August, Japanese aircraft began bombing and strafing townships and villages, some of which were key points for the commandos, and news reached them that Japanese forces were moving into Portuguese Timor from Dutch Timor. Two thousand Japanese, in four columns, moved out from Dili. The intention was plain—the survivors of Sparrow Force would be driven into a small area, contained, and annihilated.

Captain Laidlaw's platoon fell back from the sector north of Dili before 600 Japanese, but continued to harass. It was difficult hill country, where the forces soon became mixed. Corporal E. Loud, extracting his sub-section so as not to be overrun one time, left two Japanese forces firing on each other. In the western sector, the Japanese used Dutch Timorese to screen their advance while some were sent among the villagers to add to their demoralization from the bombing and strafing by telling them that the Australians would soon be wiped out and they should join the Japanese. Some did, and many Portuguese Timorese, as well as Dutch Timorese, were killed by the commandos in their ambushes of the Japanese.

Days went by with the Japanese encirclement always tightening. The Aussies then decided they must attack and break out of the encirclement. Plans were quickly made, but on the night before the attack was to begin, green flares were seen in the sky over the area. The commandos thought that they had delayed their attack too long, that the flares were the signal for an all-out Japanese attack. The Australians sent every man capable of holding a weapon into ambush positions. But reconnaissance patrols found no signs of an impending assault, no signs of trickery. When dawn came, the Japanese visibly were withdrawing. Incredulous, the Australians set off after them, following them all the way to Dili, sniping, ambushing, harassing in every way possible.

In the period that followed, problems with the Timorese became more acute—the Japanese kept up their anti-white, anti-colonialist campaign, along with bombing and strafing in areas where the people were slow in welcoming them. The commandos often had to fight off groups of Timorese. Relations between the Timorese and Portuguese also worsened. The Maubisse administrative post was attacked and the Portuguese administrator murdered. Rebellion spread, with Portuguese police and soldiers unable to contain it. On one occasion the staff of independent company headquarters witnessed 3,000 Timorese armed with spears and bows and arrows streaming past headquarters after a fight with "loyal" Timorese, swinging the severed heads of those they had killed.

Japanese paratroopers descend on the Dutch East Indies. Of 600 dropped behind Koepang in Dutch Timor, only 78 survived after four days of fighting.

In September, the Japanese 48th Division, veterans of the Philippines and Java, arrived in Dutch Timor to relieve troops there. Some units moved into Portuguese Timor as reinforcements. On September 21, about 400 of them, accompanied by hundreds of Timorese, moved on the township of Maubisse and occupied it. Two days later, 150 Japanese came out of Maubisse and were attacked by commando patrols that killed 30 of them. But two other Japanese parties came up behind, lifting the total to 350, and the commandos withdrew. Next day, Captain David Dexter, who was resting his men at a nearby Portuguese administrative post, received a telephone call from Maubisse—it was the local Japanese commander, who told Dexter he was coming to destroy him and his men. Dexter thanked him for telling him, arranged an ambush and drove the Japanese party back to Maubisse.

In Australia, where the situation on Timor had raised concern, it was decided to send the 2/4th Independent Company to assist the 2/2nd. On September 23, the 2/4th Independent Company was put ashore on the south coast of Portuguese Timor; the men of 2/2nd immediately began familiarizing the newcomers with the country and the local situation.

On the 27th, 2,000 Japanese troops moved from Dili to Maubisse, and then moved out of Maubisse screened by Timorese. The commandos fought them from a series of ambush positions, but these Japanese were experienced fighters and coolly began to outflank their ambushers, forcing them to fall back. The Japanese reached the township of Betano, and then inexplicably withdrew to Maubisse. Wondering what was going to happen next, the men of the 2/2nd continued familiarizing the 2/4th while reorganizing their positions in anticipation of more Japanese movements. One of the tactics now being used by the Japanese was to organize parties of 50 or 60 Timorese to harass commando positions, urged on by a few Japanese. Friendly villages close to independent company headquarters were attacked and burned by hostile Timorese before they could be driven off and dispersed by

Japanese troops are hailed by friendly locals as Timor joins the "Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." But the last Australians did not leave the island until February 1943, after tying down a Japanese division for nearly a year.

the guns of the headquarters staff (whereupon the loyal Timorese went in with spears and bows and arrows to finish off the intruders). The Japanese also specified a "neutral" area near Dili and ordered all Portuguese to move within it; all those outside the area would be considered active supporters of the Australians and would be shot.

By November it was clear that the 2/2nd Independent Company was coming to the end of its endurance. The commandos had been in continuous action for nine months under conditions of great mental and physical hardship, living on native foods such as rice, sweet potato and pumpkin that could not sustain them, racked by malaria and wasted by dysentery. But their combat losses had been extremely small, only 26 so far. A strict count of Japanese confirmed killed showed a ratio of 40 to 1. More important, however, the Aussie presence and activities on Timor had forced the Japanese to keep an entire division of troops on the island, a division that could have been used to great effect to the east, in the battles for Papua on New Guinea or on Guadalcanal. Colonel Spence, commander of Sparrow Force, recommended that the 2/2nd be withdrawn and rested, together with the other survivors of Sparrow Force. He foresaw that the newly emplaced 2/4th Independent Company could carry out the tasks required on Timor and that its number of men was all that could be maintained on the island at any one time.

The recommendation was approved, and the withdrawal was accomplished on the night of December 15, with the 2/4th drawing off Japanese units that were closing in on the embarkation point. A small armada sailed for Darwin but without the 2/2nd's commander, Major Callinan, or his Captain R.R. Baldwin, both of whom stayed behind to assist the 2/4th.

The 2/4th now took the full weight of increasing Japanese and hostile Timorese pressure—skirmishes became a daily occurrence. Worse, the Timorese natives disclosed the Aussie hideouts, their arms and food caches, to the Japanese, while the commandos' own sources of information dried up.

By the end of December it was obvious that the purpose of keeping commandos on Timor was no longer valid. That purpose had been intelligence-gathering and assisting in any Allied assault on Timor. Allied efforts against the Japanese now were concentrated to the east in New Guinea and the Solomons. It was decided to withdraw the commandos from Timor, leaving only 20 volunteers behind to feed information to the Allies on what the Japanese were doing on the island.

The 2/4th Independent Company, less the 20 volunteers (designated "S Force"), was withdrawn on January 9, 1943. Like the 2/2nd before it, the men were hospitalized and treated for their diseases and sicknesses. They were then given 21 days' leave, a short period of re-training, and sent to New Guinea, where several other independent companies were operating against the Japanese.

The S Force left behind was immediately in a hopeless position. Their radio lost when the pony carrying it was shot and fell in a river while they were under machine-gun and mortar attack, the volunteers made their way east and joined up with a small detachment of Z Special Force (similar to the OSS), which was also being hunted. Contact was made with Australia on the Z Special Force radio and the order was given for both units to be evacuated. They were picked up on the night of February 10th by the American submarine *Gudgeon* and returned to Australia. All that remained of Sparrow Force now on Timor were the prisoners taken by the Japanese in the first battle for Dutch Timor, many of whom were not alive when the war ended. And Timor itself was not officially surrendered to the Allies until September 11, 1945, nine days after the Japanese surrender aboard the USS *Missouri*. □

John Brown writes from Queensland, Australia. Further reading: The Years of MacArthur, *by D. Clayton James;* The Shadow's Edge: Australia's Northern War, *by Alan Powell;* We Shall Return! MacArthur's Commanders and the Defeat of Japan, *edited by William M. Leary.*

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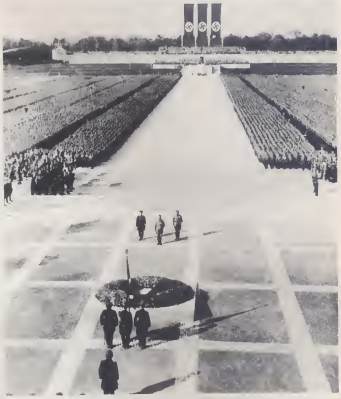

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Enter The Fox

Fifty years ago, a small contingent of German officers arrived in Tripoli to assist in the defense of what remained of Italian-held North Africa. Their commander was already formulating his strategy for defense—attack!

By Dieter Werner Hellriegel

In the first winter months of 1941, British naval forces roamed the Mediterranean almost with impunity, while British ground and air forces were making their presence increasingly felt in Greece. Nowhere, however, did the Allied cause seem to enjoy such spectacular success as in North Africa against Italian soldiers.

WWII 50th

Between December 6, 1940, and February 7, 1941, 36,000 British troops under Lt. Gen. Richard Nugent O'Connor drove the Italian 10th Army from the Egyptian border, overran Cyrenaica (in eastern Libya) and, in the course of four major battles, took 130,000 prisoners. By mid-February, only one Italian regiment stood steadfastly but uneasily between the British and Tripoli. Having achieved a lightning victory comparable to that of their German adversaries in France the previous summer, the exhausted but jubilant Tommies stood on the brink of what for them was a much-needed triumph—the conquest of Axis-held North Africa.

By the end of April, however, that situation would change radically, a process beginning, it might be argued, the very moment on February 12, 1941, that a Heinkel He-111 landed at Castel Benito airfield near Tripoli, carrying aboard it six German officers. Two days later, a convoy of ships arrived from Sicily, bringing not only reinforcements from the Italian X Corps and the Ariete Armored Division but also the first elements of the German 5th Light Division.

These developments of 50 years ago came less than a year after Italy's Fascist dictator, Benito Mussolini, declared war on the Allies on June 10, 1940. He had then turned his ambitions, among other places, on Egypt, expecting to win an easy victory over the meager British forces stationed there. On August 5, 1940, Marshal Rodolfo Graziani was ordered by *Il Duce* to annihilate the 36,000 British soldiers in the Nile Delta with his force of 250,000 men. Graziani first moved on Sidi Barrani with his insufficiently motorized army on September 13. As the outnumbered British fell back, their artillery took its toll on the generous targets presented to them by the huge Italian force, drawn up in neat rows in the desert as though on review—first the motorcyclists, then the rather light Italian tanks, followed by other vehicles.

It took the Italians four days to march 60 miles from the Libyan border to Sidi Barrani. There, they halted and had their first real taste of desert warfare against well-trained British troops. To his dismay, Marshal Graziani was ordered to advance 300 miles into Egypt and take the British seaport at Alexandria.

Graziani knew from the beginning it was a ridiculous demand. He had only enough transport for four battalions—and most of his trucks still had solid rubber tires, which were no match for the boulders and sand of the desert. He had no aircraft, no up-to-date tanks, no anti-aircraft guns and no mines to be spread out in order to delay any attacks by the British.

In February 1941, Axis officers inspect the newly arrived contingent of German troops that they hope will stiffen the Italians in their defense of Tripoli. Among those officers is one Generalleutnant Erwin Rommel, and he has an intense dislike for his British opponents to make the next year.

The Italian soldiers were poorly trained, poorly equipped and underfed. Many of them were armed with rifles dating from the 19th century. Such veteran troops as they had were used to fighting lightly armed Ethiopians, but not well-equipped British forces backed by 40 modern tanks.

For three months the Italians, under the command of General Mario Barti, took up residence around Sidi Barrani's only mosque and dug in against any British counter-attacks. Most of the Italians were quartered in seven camps fanned out in a semicircle. The officers, it is reported, spent much of their time in the officers' clubs while the enlisted men had to wait out the war in dugouts exposed to the blazing desert sun. Marshal Graziani's headquarters were 300 miles back in Cyrene, one of the most pleasant villages in Cyrenaica—palm trees, dates, eggs, plenty of Italian wines and servants for the staff officers.

In Egypt, the British had dug in at Mersa Matruh under the command of General O'Connor. His troops were fed a Spartan diet of corned beef, stew and, of course, tea. Back in Cairo, the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Archibald Wavell, and his staff waited in comfort for his principal reinforcements—30-ton Matilda tanks with 3-inch armor, impenetrable to most Italian guns, and armed with 20-pounder cannon capable of opening up the best Italian tank.

Most of the fighting in Egypt and eastern Libya took place on a kind of plateau encompassing a roughly rectangular area 500 miles long and 150 miles wide. Along the 500-mile stretch of coastal plain on the Mediterranean was an escarpment with cliffs up to 500 feet high. It was almost impossible to get to the desert plateau, and then only with tracked vehicles. On the plateau itself were vast stretches of boulders, rocks and pebbles. Driving was relatively easy. . . except for the havoc

Organizing an offensive force from his available Afrika Korps *and Italian troops and a "cardboard division" of fake tanks, Rommel ignored orders from Berlin and went on the offensive on March 24, 1941—with spectacular results.*

that such a rough surface played with tank treads, vehicle tires and mechanical equipment. There were no landmarks. It was nothing but a wasteland, a featureless terrestrial sea, navigable only by compass, stars and a blazing daytime sun.

Along the plateau's entire length there were only a few places where troops could defend a fixed position. At either end was a natural bottleneck—Halfaya Pass at the Libyan border and the railway station of El Alamein to the east. The area in between was a vast shooting range, extending from the Egyptian-Libyan border west to Msus and El Agheila, in the Gulf of Sirte. To the north of the plateau was the Mediterranean and, to the south, 80 miles from the beaches of the sea, lay the dreaded Qattara Depression, which no one would cross by vehicle—a forbidding 500-square-mile salt swamp, heated up to 150 degrees Fahrenheit in the day and cooled to 30 degrees by night.

In this arena, every vehicle, tank or truck (there rarely were marching soldiers) was an individual entity, like a battleship or destroyer maneuvering on a flat sea of boulders, rocks and pebbles that stretched as far as the eye could see. The horizon was nearly indistinguishable, because it blended in with the greyish hot air of the sky during the day. . . followed by sudden nightfall, cold to the freezing point.

From time to time, the monotony would be broken by a *ghibli*, or sandstorm. Then, time stood still for three days and nights, and it seemed as if the earth and life were coming to an end. Everything stopped—there was nothing, absolutely nothing, that one could do.

When, off in the distance, the sky turned black and a huge mountain range turned up that had not been there before, the camels joined the natives as they sank to their knees and started praying, "*Allah akbar.*" All had to protect their bodies against the harsh sand blowing through their clothes, through every crevice hole or opening in the trucks, tanks and tents, filling up machinery and equipment—nature trying to erase all that does not belong to the lifeless desert.

There were no roads south of the Mediterranean coast—just brown, yellow or gray desert. The desert seemed to bear no life—at least, one had to look very hard to discover any. And there was silence; one could hear one's blood running through one's veins. Blessed was the sound of a heartbeat.

The desert offered water very reluctantly and, when it was present, it was brackish. Water was worth more than gold, the difference between life and death.

The outcome of the North African war depended on how the fighting forces were supplied, not just with precious water, but with everything to sustain the fighting. The supply lines were 1,000 miles long for both friend and foe. It was just a matter of whose supplies would run out first. Simple as that.

At 7:00 a.m. on December 6, 1940, Mussolini's ambitions to triple the size of his empire in Africa abruptly ended. The British forces moved 75 miles toward Sidi Barrani, supported by ample supplies—enough food, water, gasoline and ammunition to last at least five days. They overran Sidi Barrani in a surprise attack at 5:00 a.m. on December 9. The Italians were busy preparing breakfast and stood no chance whatsoever. It was all over in two days, despite a sandstorm of short duration. By December 12, 40,000 Italians had surrendered. By December 16, the British had taken Sollum and Halfaya Pass. They then pushed on into Libya to take Fort Capuzzo and Sidi Omar. The coastal city of Bardia fell on January 4, 1941, with 45,000 more prisoners taken. Tobruk was next to fall, on January 21. Eight days later, 100 miles west of Tobruk, Derna fell to the British.

It was a tremendous task to move an army over hundreds of miles, but the British 7th Armored Division succeeded in racing across the desert wastelands toward Mechili and reached Beda Fomm, south of Benghazi, thus cutting off the Italians' westward escape route on February 7.

By then, attrition from the fighting and the desert itself had cost the British most of their vehicles, including their tanks,

Afrika Korps troops take up positions outside Mersa Brega prior to the assault on March 31, 1941. Although inexperienced at desert warfare, the highly disciplined and motivated Germans learned with alarming speed.

but there was not much left of the Italian forces, either. The Italian commander Graziani had abandoned his army and moved his headquarters to Tripoli. General O'Connor soon had taken a grand total of 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks and 850 guns. . . but he also had defeated the Italians too quickly. His army needed rest.

Hitler initially had given the African theater of war a low priority, regarding the defeat of the Italian army and the possible loss of Libya as a bearable misfortune. After Mussolini requested help from the Germans, however, Hitler held a conference with his military advisers on February 3 and decided, according to his protocol with Mussolini's Italy, to come to the rescue of the Italians in North Africa. Hitler ordered the formation of a new general command for the German forces in Africa. The *Luftwaffe* was ordered to enter the fray with dive bomber and fighter squadrons based in Catania and other parts of Sicily, comprising *Fliegerkorps X* under the command of *Generalleutnant* Hans-Ferdinand Geisler. Its task was to safeguard the transport of German infantry, materiel and armor, as well as anti-tank and anti-aircraft units, being ferried by sea to Tripoli. Further, the *Luftwaffe* was to carry out the bombing of the island of Malta, the British land forces in Cyrenaica, British sea transport in the Mediterranean and the land supply routes in Egypt and Libya.

The first units shipped to Africa on February 14, 1941, were the reconnaissance, anti-tank (Pak) and anti-aircraft (Flak) units of the 5th Light Division, to be followed by the infantry units and, finally, the 5th Panzer Regiment, consisting of 80 medium (Panzer III) and 70 heavy (Panzer IV) tanks. Thus, the *Deutsches Afrika Korps* (DAK) was born.

Just as important was *Generalleutnant* Erwin Rommel, who had arrived with that first contingent of six German officers on February 12, as commander of the new fighting force. Hitler had ordered that Rommel's task would be strictly defensive, judging that there were not enough forces available to drive the British out of Cyrenaica. In retrospect, such a decision seems understandable and, from a military point of view, a wise one, because nothing really was gained after two years of fighting in the desert, with high losses of life and materiel. But Hitler did not take into consideration the mentality of the strong-willed professional officer whom he had installed in the African desert, a sideshow to the rest of the war.

Erwin Rommel came from a simple "*Bürgerlichen*" family, without influence or money to speak of. He first gained fame during World War I when, as a mere *Oberleutnant*, he had led a company of mountain troops to take key mountain positions during the Battle of Caporetto in October 1917, taking 9,000 Italian prisoners with his own handful of men. During the German invasion of France in 1940, Rommel led the 7th Panzer Division with equal distinction. In 1941, at the age of 49, his only pleasure was to fight and win.

There were strong similarities between Rommel and Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, the undefeated German general who fought a brilliant four-year campaign in East Africa during World War I. Both men were educated and trained as professional soldiers in the *Kaiserreich*—the First Reich of Imperial Germany—in a fashion rigidly dictated by the militarily oriented, middle-class society of their time. They were patriotic and loyal to the existing government and social system (whoever happened to be running the show) and both cherished the status and privileges that their pre-1914 officer rank conferred upon them. They shared a common small-town background through childhoods that nurtured the conservative values of their time—which, in Rommel's case, left him with a hatred for Hitler and Nazism that he suppressed in deference to his sense of duty to the Fatherland. Both men saw the rise and fall of the imperial First Reich, the misery of the Second Reich and the rise and fall of the Third Reich, although Rommel was only to catch a glimpse of the end before being hounded by the Gestapo to

"Our Rommel" – Always There With Us!

As a former *Unteroffizier* (staff sergeant) in Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps*, I believe that Rommel knew exactly how to get the most out of his men, that he consciously made use of his special rapport with them. The discipline he enforced on his troops was very strict, but fair in that it was always used as a means to an end—to make his men as ready and prepared as possible for what lay ahead of them.

We, his soldiers, all knew the stories told of Rommel suddenly turning up in the middle of a battle, standing in his staff car and yelling, "Attack, attack!"

Rommel's aggressive attitude was shared by soldiers whose skill, resourcefulness and motivation would be essential to the attainment of his goals. Contrary to a popular misconception, the *Afrika Korps* was not an elite unit at its inception, but merely a group of average German soldiers who adapted to their harsh environment and, most significant, evolved into a redoubtable force through the special rapport they developed with their commander.

The soldiers of the *Afrika Korps*, which I would join and serve in myself late in 1941, were mostly young—the best human material Germany had at hand. And what did we know at the age of 20, 25 or even 30? Our generation had lived a decade in Hitler's Germany, under the control of his Nazi Party and unaware of the extent to which we were manipulated by our government's propaganda. There were exceptions, but usually "the system" shut them up. Our ignorance, our inability to educate ourselves and to ask questions—such as why and how we came to be where we were, and what we were doing—was one of the reasons that we were so stoical and bore whatever fate held in store for us.

Incomprehensible though it seems now, we believed also in a Providence, who had given us a leader, Adolf Hitler, who could do no wrong and who was taking us and the world into a better future.

The spirit of the *Afrika Korps* was founded on the belief that our fight was right, that we had to confront the British Army and assist our Italian ally. That spirit was fostered by propaganda, intense military training, faith in the leadership and, finally, extraordinary patriotism. It was also founded on the comradeship of teamwork formed by the German soldiers. For all of Rommel's flair and dash in leadership, none of his victories or strategic retreats could have been possible without the high morale of his fighting troops.

Ever eager to keep abreast of the situation, Rommel and an aide prepare to reconnoiter the battlefield in an Fi.156 Storch.

The inspiration of Rommel's leadership was not limited exclusively to the *Afrika Korps.* Many Italian troops, previously demoralized by their overprivileged officer corps and inept leadership, became spirited fighters under Rommel's command. The Ariete Armored Division in particular was one of the finest divisions I fought alongside, earning Rommel's trust in almost every battle from Mechili to El Alamein.

I learned all of that when I served in Rommel's special personal combat force, or *Kampfstaffel.* There, the spirit of the *Afrika Korps* was particularly strong, due to the unique influence and presence of Rommel.

My own small role in the desert war began on September 18, 1941, when my transport ship, the Italian ocean liner *Neptunia*, was sunk while en route to Tripoli, by the British submarine HMS *Upholder.* After 14 hours in the water, I was rescued and made my belated arrival the next day. Among other duties, I served in the 1st (staff) Company of the *Kampfstaffel* as bookkeeper and supply sergeant, and later in the 2nd Company, which used captured British Cruiser Mark VI "Crusader" tanks and M-3 "Honey" light tanks (as much as 50 percent of *Afrika Korps'* vehicles were captured). My logistics duties usually involved directly supplying the fighting units with ammunition, fuel and food, usually under fire, using such improvisations as a Crusader with its turret removed and converted into a gasoline transport.

I had only two occasions to talk to Rommel personally during my period of service in his battle group. Once, he stopped when walking past my tent and turned to ask me how long it had been since I had gone home on leave. When I told him that I had never had any leave, he smiled and said: "Why haven't you got dysentery yet? Then we would be able to send you home."

On the other occasion, he walked past when I had sat down for lunch. I had made some sandwiches with corned beef and pickles, and he asked me what they tasted like. So I offered him one, which he bit into with apparent enjoyment, and then he walked off with his staff officers in their red-striped trousers.

What I liked about Rommel was that he was there with us, right where we were—in the thick of the action. We knew when we were ordered to attack that somewhere he would be attacking with us, that he risked his life as we risked ours. He retreated with us and, when we counterattacked, he was there with us.

Every one of us knew that he ate the same lousy food that we did and that he drank the same vile, salty coffee as we did. It was always a boost to morale to catch sight of him, whether we were retreating or advancing. And he showed himself, standing upright in his car or armored wagon, "*Greif,*" so that we could see him. He was all over the place. That is why I, and I think all the men of the *Afrika Korps*, called him then and still call him now, "Our Rommel."

D.W.H.

take poison after being accused of participating in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944.

Both Lettow-Vorbeck and Rommel fought in Africa against overwhelming odds, under adverse and ultimately hopeless conditions, the consequences of which they did not really wish to consider. Both made do with the relatively little that was put at their disposal whether in equipment and supplies or in numbers of soldiers. Their commands were far enough away from the general staff in Berlin for each of them to stamp his own personality on the campaign that he fought, making decisions very much in his own individual style.

While neither Lettow-Vorbeck nor Rommel can be considered military geniuses, both were unconventional thinkers well-served by excellent staffs who advised them well on courses of action and handled the important administrative and organizational side of running an army. The two generals were imaginative and unorthodox in the way they led their forces and both had an uncanny sixth sense that often allowed them to intuitively make quick decisions on the battlefield. They often had to take a gamble, too. It was not the same for the opposing Allied commanders, who did not have to gamble in that manner, although some Allied commanders did take risks (one exception was the very cautious Bernard Montgomery, who tried to measure every step before he took it). For Rommel and for Lettow-Vorbeck, circumstances were such that they were forced to take risks in an effort to redress the materiel imbalance.

Whenever possible, both men liked to put themselves right up in the front line with their officers and men. They took the same risks as the soldiers they led. Such attitudes earned them the admiration of their soldiers, which manifested itself in a willingness to respond to every request for greater effort to the limit of their abilities and to the end of their endurance.

Rommel knew exactly how to get the most out of his men and he consciously made use of his special rapport with them. The discipline he enforced on his troops was very strict, but fair in that it was always used as a means to an end—to make his men as ready and prepared as possible for what lay ahead of them. His soldiers knew the stories told of Rommel suddenly turning up in the middle of a battle, standing up in his staff car and yelling, "Attack, attack!"

From the time Rommel arrived in Tripoli, he decided to attack his enemy as fast as possible, knowing that the British were waiting to replenish their supplies before resuming any major action. Within hours, he was up in his Fieseler Fi.156 *Storch* and had selected a forward position at a village about halfway along the coastal road between Tripoli and El Agheila, one of the few natural bottlenecks suitable for defense. He ordered his newly arrived reconnaissance and anti-tank battalion to Sirte and, by February 17, he was able to write to his wife, Lucie: "*Hier ist alles gut und was mich anbelangt, sie konnen kommen* (Everything is fine with me and, as far as I am concerned, they can come now)."

But the British did not come. They had a new field commander in Cyrenaica, Lt. Gen. Philip Neame. Like Rommel, Neame was as yet unversed in desert warfare, but he lacked Rommel's confidence and, moreover, his proposed strategy for eventually following up O'Connor's victory was judged impracticable by his superior, General Wavell. As for the British C.I.C. in Cairo, he saw no urgent need to hurry—British intelligence had learned something of the Axis buildup in Tripoli, but Wavell discounted the possibility of an Axis counteroffensive before May.

Wavell's thoughts unwittingly were echoed by the commander-in-chief of the German armed forces, Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch. On March 19, Rommel flew to Berlin to seek permission to attack the enemy immediately, but received a firm "No" as an answer. Returning to North Africa, Rommel ignored the order and went ahead with his aggressive plans. Without waiting for the arrival of his 15th Panzer Division (which was scheduled to join him in May), Rommel attacked the British positions across a 1,000-yard front at El Agheila at dawn on March 24. The Panzer I and II light tanks and eight-wheeled armored cars of the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion spearheaded the attack while, behind them, all vehicles were ordered to raise dust—just dust, a tactical deception of Rommel's own invention. The battle was also joined by tanks that were incapable of firing a shot, because they were dummies mounted on Volkswagens. Known as the "Cardboard Division," they suggested a large fighting force. The surprised British swiftly withdrew from El Agheila and fell back 30 miles northeast, to Mersa Brega.

"Water was worth more than gold. . ." And the supply was anything but predictable. This thirsty German is making the most of what is available while it lasts.

Rommel stayed at El Agheila for a week, but then, impatient, he thrust forward on March 31 with the 5th Panzer Regiment along the Coastal Road and charged toward Mersa Brega. It is said that during that advance the men first shouted "*Hia safari*," the Bantu call of "drive forward" used by Lettow-Vorbeck's askaris in East Africa during World War I.

One British infantry battalion, a brigade of 25-pounder guns and an anti-tank regiment fought the Germans to a standstill into the afternoon, but at that crucial point the commander of the British 2nd Armored Division declined to commit his 3rd Armored Brigade to a counterattack, judging it too late in the day to be effective. Regaining the initiative, the German 5th Light drove on to secure Mersa Brega and force the British to withdraw.

On the road to Tobruk, the crew of a Panzer IV gets directions in the middle of a sandstorm. As the German offensive continued, fuel and water cans and rations boxes joined the spare parts that decorated the exteriors of their tanks.

Keeping up the pressure, Rommel took Agedabia on April 2, releasing the German genie from an eight-mile bottleneck. Now faced with three possible directions of advance—along the coast to Benghazi, through the desert to Mechili, or a route between the two via Msus, Rommel violated a cardinal rule of conventional battlefield strategy by dividing his force (but also fleshing out his formations with Italians) and taking all three routes.

The intuition behind Rommel's calculated risk was vindicated by a breakdown in confidence on the part of the British command, with an accompanying rise in German (and even Italian) confidence born of their recent successes. Judging Neame to be losing control of the situation, Wavell recalled O'Connor to act as his adviser. At the same time, the British decision to evacuate Benghazi was reconsidered, leaving British forces divided between a mobile force in the desert and the element left to defend Benghazi. Even as confusion set in among the British, Rommel received word that the German High Command, encouraged by his surprising success, was giving him a free hand—and expecting the Italian High Command, to whom he was nominally subordinate, to do the same.

After taking Benghazi on April 4, the German 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion turned east along the coastal route, only to be repulsed by an Australian battalion, supported by 25-pounders, at Er Regima. The central German column also encountered rough going as it advanced on Msus and Mechili. The easternmost German prong, reinforced by 40 tanks of the Italian Ariete Armored Division, followed an inland path that an Italian general had described as a death trap but which Rommel, saying he placed "more faith in my own observation," had reconnoitered himself. The latter battle group, in fact, made the most progress of the three, arriving at Mechili on April 6 to overwhelm the 3rd Indian Motorized Brigade (which had no anti-tank artillery) and entrap the rapidly disintegrating British 2nd Armored Division. Meanwhile, the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion resumed its advance along the coast, taking the port of Barce on April 5 and Derna on April 7.

Within the area of Rommel's three-pronged attack, confusion reigned as scattered British units were overtaken and rounded up. Rommel himself nearly landed his *Storch* alongside a British motorized column, mistaking it for one of his own. On the night of April 6, Generals O'Connor and Neame were being driven to Tmimi when they blundered into a German checkpoint and were taken prisoner by its lone guard. Two divisional commanders were also among the 2,000 British and Indian prisoners taken when Mechili fell on April 7. Only Maj. Gen. L.J. Morshead's 9th Australian Infantry Division, located west of Mechili, escaped the debacle intact and retreated to Tobruk, where the Australians would soon earn their own place in the pages of history.

Such, then, was *Afrika Korps*' debut and the beginning of more than two years of seesaw conflict on the war's most desolate landscape, a campaign that would emblazon an exotic series of names into World War II's annals: Tobruk, Sidi Rezegh, Bir Hakeim, Gazala, El Alamein, Kasserine Pass, El Ghettar, Mareth, Medenine and Tunis. *Afrika Korps* would win some battles, lose others—and, in the end, lose the war for North Africa—but in all of them it would acquit itself honorably, earning the respect of its opponents even in its hour of final defeat. □

After nearly two years of service in Africa, Dieter Hellriegel returned to Germany in March 1943 (thus avoiding the Afrika Korps' *surrender in May) and survived the last Battle of Berlin in May 1945. Now a retired marine consultant and surveyor, Mr. Hellriegel lives in Lihue, Hawaii, and is seeking a publisher for a book that he has just completed on his wartime experiences. For further reading try:* The Desert Fox, *by Desmond Young; and* The Foxes of the Desert, *by Paul Carell.*

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Model For Defense

Biak Island had all the elements of the Pacific War—including a stubborn Japanese defense that would prove costly to Americans elsewhere.

By Nathan N. Prefer

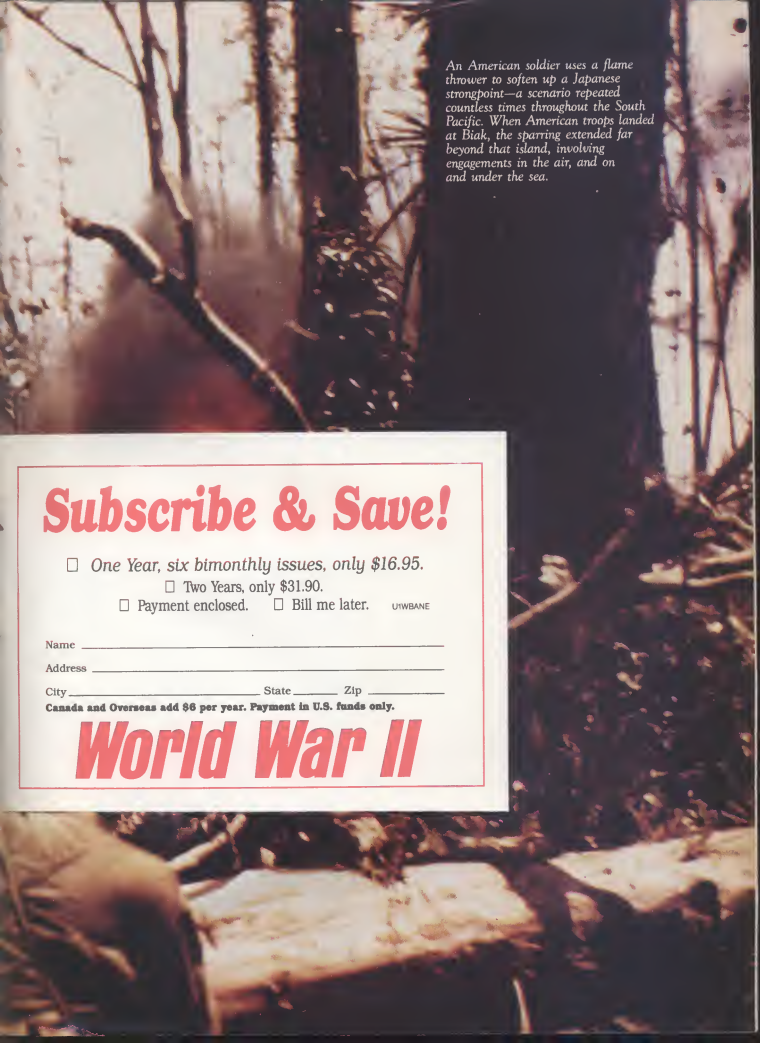
For his final approach to the Philippines in 1944, Douglas MacArthur's next objective was Geevlink Bay—the major body of water near the tip of New Guinea that was the major staging area for Japanese forces sent to relieve the garrisons farther east after MacArthur bypassed them in his hopscotch campaign along New Guinea's northern coast.

A coral island of medium size, covered with jungle and hills, rose ominously from the waters near the entrance to Geevlink Bay—Biak.

By seizing this island, MacArthur could accomplish two objectives. He would cork the bottle of Geevlink Bay, thus keeping the Japanese out of that area, while at the same time he would be obtaining additional airfields for his Fifth Air Force, which in turn would support his pending invasion of the Philippine Islands. The Japanese garrison on Biak had two airfields completed and a third under construction. It was vital to seize all three facilities quickly, not only to support additional operations by the Southwest Pacific Theatre forces under MacArthur's command but also to support Admiral Chester Nimitz's pending invasion of the Mariana Islands, scheduled to begin on June 15.

MacArthur had previously promised Nimitz that he would provide air support from Biak in return for Nimitz's earlier loan of his fleet carriers for MacArthur's Hollandia operation on the New Guinea north coast. The capture of Biak was expected to be the last major land and sea operation for MacArthur before he finally proceeded on to the Philippines.

Biak, largest of the Schouten Islands, was covered with thick rain forest and jungle-type vegetation. Much of the remaining terrain was made up of coral outcroppings, ridges and shelves. The largest flatland, good for airfields, lay on the southeastern part of the island. Here also were the main



An American soldier uses a flame thrower to soften up a Japanese strongpoint—a scenario repeated countless times throughout the South Pacific. When American troops landed at Biak, the sparring extended far beyond that island, involving engagements in the air, and on and under the sea.

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World War II

Model For Defense

Biak Island had all the elements of the Pacific War—including a stubborn Japanese defense that wo to Americans els

By Nathan N.

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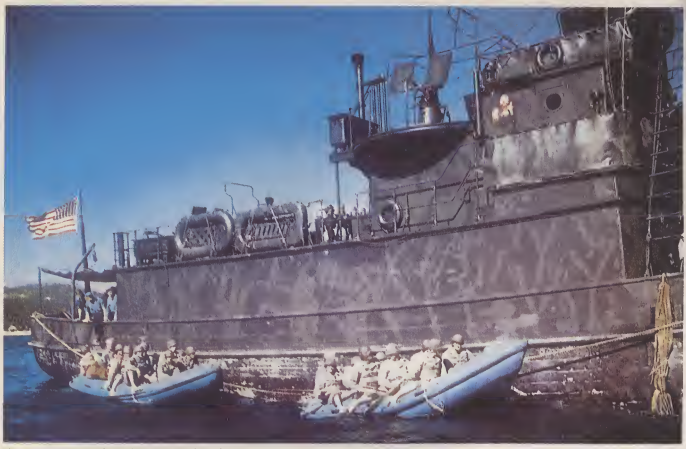

American troops disembark from their landing ship to make their way ashore in assault boats. Sea currents caused each of the first two assaulting forces—the 162nd and 186th infantry regiments—to land on the other's intended beach.

population centers, the villages of Bosnek, Sorido and Opiaref. Two other major villages were Korim to the northeast and Wardo to the northwest. Coral reefs fringed most of the obscure island.

Off to the southeast was a group of small islands, the Padaidos. Soepiori Island, smaller sister to Biak, lay immediately off to the northwest corner of Biak, the two separated only by a narrow strait.

The command that MacArthur planned to use for his seizure of Biak was known as Alamo Force, a pseudonym for the Sixth U.S. Army, under Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger. He picked the 41st Infantry Division to be the assaulting force against Biak, an experienced division that had been fighting for nearly two years now through the jungles and hills of New Guinea and was considered both hardened and competent. The landing force would be supported by the 7th Fleet Amphibious Force, under Rear Adm. Daniel Barbey. Air support would be provided by the Fifth Air Force and Thirteenth Air Force, both under the overall command of Lt. Gen. George C. Kenney.

All three forces were experienced, with a long string of successes behind them. As for the opposition to be anticipated on Biak, according to estimates from the Allied intelligence officers, the Japanese garrison consisted of only 4,000 troops—the seemingly overwhelming might of the 41st Infantry Division and its supporting units would easily overcome any such opposition.

Unfortunately, American intelligence was in serious error. The Japanese on Biak, known as the Biak Detachment, had as their major unit of defense the 222nd Infantry Regiment from the 36th Japanese Infantry Division, the balance of which was on the nearby mainland. The regimental commander, Colonel Naoyuki Kuzume, was also the commander of the Biak Detachment. Reinforced by a company of divisional light tanks, field and anti-aircraft artillery, three field airdrome construction units and some 1,500 naval troops, Kuzume actually had about 11,400 soldiers and sailors available to oppose any American assault, and at least 4,000 of his men were combat veterans from China.

Kuzume did have some serious problems in planning his defense. Warned by his superiors that an American attack was certain, he could not defend the airstrips, the obvious American objective, with fully adequate forces and still have enough troops to defend the entire coastline, nor did he have enough troops to defend in strength the coast along the airfields. So he decided to defend in strength the cave-riddled cliffs and high ground that overlooked the airfields. From there he could prevent the Americans from using the airstrips while reinforcements came by sea and destroyed the Americans from behind. When word came of an American landing at nearby Wakde off the New Guinea mainland, Colonel Kuzume ordered all construction work on the last airfield stopped and all his troops into the hills to prepare their defensive positions. All his artillery and anti-aircraft weapons were hauled into the hills and positioned to cover both the airfields and the coastal road that connected them. From here, Colonel Kuzume felt reasonably confident that he would hold the Americans at bay until his reinforcements could arrive.

As events proved, the commander of Biak Detachment had considered well and, except for the poor state of the Japanese Imperial Navy, he might have succeeded.

Early on May 27, 1944, the 41st Infantry Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. Horace H. Fuller, began its assault landing against Biak Island. General Fuller also commanded Hurricane Task Force, which essentially was the 41st Infantry Division reinforced by several airfield construction battalions whose job was to immediately restore the airfields for Allied use.

The initial landings went well, and there was no sign of serious Japanese opposition. Even so, the Americans did not get off easily. The sea currents in the area were stronger than expected and the initial assaulting forces—the 186th and 162nd infantry regiments—landed on the wrong beaches. In effect, each unit landed on the other's beaches. Colonel Oliver P. Newman, commanding the 186th Infantry Regiment, asked Fuller for permission to change missions with the 162nd Infantry. This would have avoided each regiment having to cross in front of the other in order to attain their respective initial objectives. But Fuller ordered the units to march across each other's front and take their planned positions. This delayed operations and confused the troops considerably.

One false impression the Americans formed from the confusion was that the Japanese would not seriously contest the landings. In fact, the Japanese had never intended to contest the assault at the beaches—simply, the Japanese did not know which landing beaches to defend. Instead, the Japanese were waiting for the Americans to march on the airfields as the obvious prize.

While the 186th Infantry secured the beachhead area, the 162nd advanced toward the two completed airstrips off to the west. Two battalions advanced in a column along the road leading to the airfields from the beaches. Another battalion hacked through the jungle to protect the inland flank of the advancing regiment. By midday, the advance was approaching Parai, a village that lay near a defile where the road passed between the sea and a high cliff covered with thick jungle growth. Here, for the first time, the Japanese began to fire upon the approaching Americans.

In response, tanks of the 603rd Tank Company deployed in support of the 162nd Infantry and opened fire on the Japanese snipers, effectively scattering them and permitting the 162nd Infantry to move through and past the Parai defile.

In the meantime, the inland battalion was unable to proceed through the thick jungle and was forced to return to the road and follow the first two battalions along the same pathway to Parai. This left the regiment with no inland flank protection against the Japanese, an advantage the Japanese had been seeking.

The delay caused by the confusion at the beaches and by the Japanese at the Parai defile had cost most of the daylight hours. By the end of the day, the 162nd Infantry Regiment was only part way to the airfield, while the 186th Infantry was still busy securing the beachhead area. Division headquarters had landed, along with some 12,000 additional troops, and had been established near the village of Bosnek. Five supporting artillery battalions were also located near the village. With darkness, all units were ordered to dig in and prepare to defend themselves during the night, preparatory to proceeding and seizing the airfields on the following day.

May 27 had been an unhappy day for Japanese Colonel Kusume. He had been caught out of position by the landings, and the initial reactions of his troops had been less than expected. Positions which had been prepared for defense were unmanned, and in their few contacts with the Americans, some of his troops had performed poorly, retreating as soon as fired upon. Colonel Kusume had not done well, nor had his 222nd Infantry.

Fortunately for the Japanese, though, the chief of staff of the Second Area Army happened to be on Biak inspecting the defenses. This officer, Lt. Gen. Takazo Numata, quickly took command and ordered the defenses properly manned. One of his first actions was to order a counterattack by the 3rd Battalion, 222nd Infantry, which fell upon Batteries B and C of the American 146th Field Artillery Battalion, which had settled near the village of Ibdi for the night. The attack was driven back by machine-gun and rifle fire, but not before five Americans died and another nine were wounded. A small

Having encountered virtually no resistance on the beaches, men of the 162nd Infantry advance inland to secure the airfields. They encountered their first stiff resistance at the village of Parai.

action, it did not reveal to the commanders of the 41st Infantry Division that things on Biak were about to change. That they were to discover on the following day.

While the fighting on Biak unfolded slowly, the Imperial Japanese Navy was in a quandary. The Navy's high command still was hoping for a "decisive battle" that would stop the Americans in the Pacific. The problem was that, in order to prepare for such a battle, the Japanese had to know with certainty where the next Allied attack would come. Opinion was divided as to whether the Central Pacific drive under Nimitz, or the Southwest Pacific drive under MacArthur, was the main Allied effort.

As a result, the Japanese Army did not favor a strong effort to defend Biak, but the Imperial Japanese Navy did. Japanese submarines were sent into the area in strength to warn of Allied ships and to harass any Allied forces attempting to advance along the New Guinea coast. Unfortunately for the Japanese Navy, the submarines ran into the champion submarine killer of the war, the destroyer escort *England.* Only commissioned in December 1943, the *England,* under the command of Lt. Cmdr. Walton B. Pendleton, was on her first combat assignment. Intelligence had learned of the Japanese submarine effort, and the *England,* in company with fellow destroyer escorts *George* (Lt. Cmdr. Fred W. Just) and *Raby* (Lt. Cmdr. James Scott II) was ordered to investigate.

Proceeding to the estimated position of the Japanese, the three destroyer escorts sailed in a scouting formation. There was little excitement expected, for at this stage of the war the Japanese submarine menace was too often discounted by many U.S. naval officers. Suddenly, on May 19, the *England* made underwater contact with a submarine. Commander Pendleton attacked, and after five runs destroyed the *I-16.* Proceed-

American troops examine a Japanese coastal gun, left behind when Colonel Naoyuki Kuzume discarded plans for defending the beach and moved inland with his lighter artillery.

ing as ordered, the group was next alerted by a radar contact by *George*. Attacking, *George* forced the *RO-106* to dive. Commander Just made the first attack but missed. *England* made the next two attacks and sank the submarine. The next day, May 23, *Raby* made first contact, all three attacked . . . and *England* killed *RO-104*. The following day, a solo *England* contacted and sank *RO-116*. On May 26, *Raby* contacted and *England* sank *RO-108*.

Five confirmed kills in seven days was certainly unique. But the *England* was not quite finished. After refueling and taking on more anti-submarine ammunition, *England*, *George* and *Raby*, reinforced by an escort carrier and additional destroyers and destroyer escorts, returned to the open sea. Once again contact was made with a submarine, this time by the *Hazelwood* (Commander V.P. Douw). *Hazelwood* attacked. *George* attacked and damaged the submarine. *Raby* attacked. The three ships spent the next night alternately tracking and attacking this submarine. The following day, warned of a possible air attack, the *England* and the *Spangler* (Lt. Cmdr. D.J. McFarlane) were ordered to attack. *Spangler* missed. *England* didn't. The sixth Japanese submarine, *RO-105*, was destroyed.

The Japanese Navy's first attempt to influence the Battle of Biak had ended disastrously. Five of the eight submarines sent to intercept Allied naval forces had fallen to one destroyer escort supported by two others. *RO-108* and *RO-109*, warned by Japanese naval headquarters of the disaster, quickly left the area around New Guinea. The eighth submarine, *I-44*, survived, although badly damaged by Allied air attacks.

While the U.S. Navy was taking such an unexpected strong hand in the Battle of Biak, the troops of 41st Infantry Division ashore knew little of the events at sea. With the coming of daylight on the second day, the 162nd Infantry moved forward, resuming its easy advance of the previous day. Supported by the 146th Field Artillery Battalion and the 603rd Tank Company, the regiment was supposed to seize Mokmer Village as a prelude to securing the nearby airdrome.

However, on this day, Japanese General Numata's control of the battle began to make itself felt. As the 162nd Infantry advanced, Japanese sniper and light machine-gun fire, much heavier than the previous day, slowed the advance. Nevertheless, by the middle of the morning the leading elements of the 162nd Infantry had passed through Mokmer and were nearing the first airfield, a prime objective of the operation. At first, Japanese resistance seemed negligible, but as the Americans approached the airdrome, after passing through the village, the 2nd Battalion, 222nd Japanese Infantry Regiment, counterattacked heavily, using heavy mortar and machine-gun fire. Supporting artillery fire from the 146th Field Artillery Battalion failed to suppress the Japanese fire, and the 3rd Battalion, 162nd Infantry, withdrew some 600 yards to reorganize.

The Japanese of the 2nd Battalion, 222nd Infantry, did not let the Americans rest. Continuing their devastating fire, the Japanese increased the pressure. Committing more troops to the battle, the Japanese circled the 3rd Battalion and finally drove a wedge between it and the rest of the 162nd Infantry. By noon on May 28, 3rd Battalion was cut off from the rest of the 41st Infantry Division and fighting to survive.

Individual platoons of the 3rd Battalion found themselves cut off and separated from any other unit. Company G of the 2nd Battalion, in attempting to force the Japanese from the high ground, then found itself surrounded and only by skillful maneuvering was able to return intact to the main regimental position. It quickly became apparent that there would be no easy way to relieve the 3rd Battalion.

About midafternoon the Japanese made their major attack against the stranded battalion, this time using tanks in the assault waves. Supported by 3rd Platoon, 603rd Tank Company, and gunfire from U.S. Navy destroyers offshore, the Americans repulsed the tank assault.

Only tanks now could get through the curtain of fire between the 2nd and 3rd battalions, so the 1st Platoon, 603rd Tank Company, was sent forward in support. Supplies and ammunition, which had reached critical levels at 3rd Battalion, were maintained by small craft of the 542nd Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment, which played a cat-and-mouse game with the Japanese gunners, waiting for a chance to dash into shore, dump their supplies, load the critically wounded, and escape. By late afternoon, General Fuller had no choice but to order the 3rd Battalion to withdraw to the positions held by the 2nd Battalion.

The balance of the afternoon was spent in withdrawing the more advanced 3rd Battalion. Pulling back in small groups, each with tank support and offshore naval gunfire, the 3rd Battalion managed to withdraw into the 2nd Battalion's positions by late afternoon. Nearly 100 men had been wounded and 16 killed in a day's fighting. Worse yet, there was no promise that tomorrow would be any better.

While the Americans were discouraged, the Japanese were encouraged. The Japanese seemed to get their fighting spirit back. Additional combat units, including infantry and more tanks, were thrown into battle in the effort to push the Americans off the island entirely. Early on the morning of May 29, the Japanese renewed their attacks, this time directed at the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry. This unit, supported by the 2nd Platoon, 603rd Tank Company, was in defensive positions along the coastal road, half a mile east of Mokmer Village. The first assault was a joint effort by the Japanese 2nd and 3rd battalions, 222nd Infantry, and it was repulsed. One hour later, these same units returned to the attack, this time with tanks from the 36th Infantry Division Tank Company. In the first tank-versus-tank battle of the Southwest Pacific area, the

attack of the Japanese infantry supported by armor failed, and quite predictably so. The Japanese tanks were very light by American standards, carrying only 37mm cannon and two machine guns. Although their attack did cause American casualties, it was severely repulsed with the destruction of all the Japanese armor. Hits by the Japanese tanks on the American Sherman tanks had no effect. For the Americans, the greatest problem was having to fire two rounds to destroy each enemy tank, since the first, an armor-piercing shell, invariably went right through the enemy tank without exploding. The second round, of high explosive, was needed to ensure destruction of each Japanese tank. The attacking infantry, meanwhile, was repulsed by the crew-served weapons of the 2nd Battalion, 162nd Infantry.

By this time, Fuller had become aware that his force was inadequate to do the job assigned. Clearly, the Japanese defending on Biak Island were more numerous and more determined than he had been led to expect. He urged General Krueger's Sixth Army Headquarters to send him his third infantry regiment, the 163rd Infantry, which just then was engaged in the Wakde Island operation.

Even with the 163rd on hand, though, General Fuller's forces could not manage to break through the Japanese defenses, and seize the objective airfields. Continual skirmishing only produced more casualties without either side gaining or losing ground. Clearly there would have to be a major effort of all units involved to push the Japanese beyond the airfields and into the deeper jungles.

TOP: Destroyer Escort England *(DE-635) blundered into the scouting line of Japanese submarines northeast of Biak—and into sub-hunting history. ABOVE: The small coastal-defense submarine* RO-106 *sails off to take her station in the picket line southwest of Manus Island—only to become victim number two of six for* England.

While the American ground forces were stymied on Biak Island, the Imperial Japanese Navy decided to take a fresh hand. The combined fleet staff had prepared a detailed plan for the relief of Biak, labeled "Operation *Kon*." This called for 2,500 troops of the 2nd Amphibious Brigade to be transported from Mindanao in the Philippines to Biak. Since transport was scarce for the Japanese at this stage of the war, the troops would be carried on the same warships expected to cover the deployment to Biak, as a force commanded by Rear Adm. Naoma Sakonju from his flagship, the heavy cruiser *Aoba*.

Light cruiser *Kinu* and destroyers *Shikinami*, *Uranami* and *Shigure* would carry the troops while screened by battleship *Fuso*, heavy cruisers *Myoko* and *Haguro* and five additional destroyers. Air cover was to be provided by the reinforced 23rd Air Flotilla. Additional reinforcements were to be sent to Biak by barge transport.

Operation *Kon* began with an air attack June 2 at the Biak beaches, while the naval group sailed the same evening. After a few hours at sea, the Japanese spotted a periscope and heard what was interpreted as an Allied submarine sending a contact report to its headquarters. This was the U.S. submarine *Ray* (Lt. Cmdr. Brooks Harral). Actually, the Japanese had been shadowed by submarines *Gurnard* (Lt. Cmdr. Herbert Andrews), *Bluefish* (Lt. Cmdr. Charles Henderson) and *Cabrilla* (Lt. Cmdr. William Thompson) since they had left Tawitawi on the night of May 30. None had been able to get close enough to attack, and only *Ray* properly identified the ships, although all the subs sent off contact reports.

Admiral Sakonju was unhappy about being observed, and immediately after the submarine sighting, he received additional disturbing news from headquarters. The Allied covering force at Biak reportedly included an aircraft carrier. It didn't, and the report may have originated from the Allied attack on nearby Surabaya, in which U.S. and British aircraft carriers did take part. In any event, the seeming event was enough to make Admiral Toyoda order the operation postponed. Admiral Sakonju ordered the ships back to Tawitawi and Davao, where destroyer *Kazegumo* was sunk by the U.S. submarine *Hake* (Commander Chester Nimitz, Jr.). Ironically, at the time the Japanese *Kon* force withdrew before what it believed to be superior forces, the Allied forces at sea around Biak consisted of only the U.S. destroyers *Reid*, *Mustin* and *Russell*. Additionally covering the landings at a distance were Allied cruisers HMAS *Australia*, USS *Phoenix*, *Boise* and *Nashville*, with 14 destroyers, including two Australian. This force, under the command of Rear Adm. V.A.C. Crutchley, Royal Navy, was roughly equal to the Japanese force that withdrew in response to poor intelligence.

Later, having determined that there was no American aircraft carrier protecting the Biak operation, Sakonju sailed again (on June 8), this time with six destroyers, of which three were carrying 600 troops to reinforce the Japanese garrison on Biak. The Fifth U.S. Air Force had no planes immediately available to attack Admiral Sakonju's force, but, 10 B-25s of the 17th Reconnaissance Squadron, with P-38 fighters in support, attacked the force at midday on June 8. Destroyer *Harusame* went under while destroyers *Shiratsuyu*, *Shikinami* and *Samidare* were damaged. The attack was costly, however, with three crews, including that of the squadron commander Major William G. Tennille, Jr., shot down. The remaining

Its 5-inch gun crews alert for possible attack from sea, shore or sky, destroyer Kalk *makes a high-speed pass close alongside the Biak beachhead, hoping to free landing craft stranded on the beach with its wake.*

B-25s were so badly damaged that the squadron was temporarily withdrawn from combat.

Rear Admiral Sakonju was not to be deterred a second time. Pausing to recover survivors of *Harusame*, his reinforcement force then continued on to Biak. The next eight hours were uneventful and then came a report from a scout of the 23rd Air Flotilla that an enemy task force had been sighted, headed at high speed for the Japanese. Nevertheless, perhaps influenced by the earlier last false report of an aircraft carrier, Admiral Sakonju continued toward Biak. Withdrawing a second time without contacting an actual enemy would be unthinkable.

Just before midnight on June 8, one of his destroyers reported sighting a sizable enemy task force. The Japanese now saw little choice but to withdraw. Sakonju ordered a reversal of course, his ships cast off their towed troop barges, and the force raced off into the night.

The Allied force was Rear Admiral Crutchley's flotilla, which now consisted of heavy cruiser *Australia*, light cruisers *Phoenix* and *Boise* and 14 escorting destroyers. Crutchley knew that the Japanese were nearby from his own scouting reports—he also knew that his own force had been seen by Japanese scouts. His task force had spent the preceding hours searching for the Japanese, to prevent their reinforcements from landing on Biak, but it wasn't until two hours before midnight that naval scout planes could report the size and course of the Japanese column to Admiral Crutchley. He immediately set an interception course, which resulted in the meeting of the two forces near midnight.

The Japanese ships began the race with a long lead, and the Allied ships struggled to come within range. As time passed, it became clear to Crutchley that only the leading eight U.S. destroyers had any chance of closing. Therefore, he ordered the Australian destroyers *Arunta* (Commander A.E. Buchanan) and *Warramunga* (Commander N.A. Mackinnon) to find and sink the barges cast off by the retreating Japanese. The remaining four U.S. destroyers would return to screen his cruisers, which would stay behind to keep out of the way.

After more than two hours of chasing the Japanese, and inflicting slight damage on three of their ships, the eight American destroyers were now approaching an area of ocean where Allied planes were free to fire on all ships without stopping to identify them. Admiral Crutchley ordered all units to return rather than risk a fight between Allied forces. Still, the Allies had turned back a second attempt to reinforce Biak.

This is not to say the Japanese were through with Biak. Having failed twice with local forces, the Japanese high command now decided to make a major effort to reinforce Biak Island. The Imperial Japanese Navy organized a new task force that included its two largest battleships, the *Yamato* and *Musashi*, two heavy cruisers, additional light cruisers and many destroyers to escort troop transports to Biak. Several smaller craft and transporting units would follow and land additional troops on Biak Island. Also under Sakonju, this force was scheduled to leave from the Philippines for Biak on June 15, 1944. In the meantime, however, mixed intelligence reports kept the Japanese high command uncertain. Allied war ships bombarded Japanese positions in the Marianas Islands on June 11 and 12. And Japanese submarines were being destroyed at the rate of nearly one a day off New Guinea, indication of a large Allied task force there.

Opinion remained divided among the Japanese naval staff as to where the next major American blow would fall. Finally, with the American strikes in the Marianas (Nimitz) continuing, Admiral Toyoda suspended Operation *Kon*, pending the outcome of events in the Marianas. It was never resumed. In the meantime, the Japanese also had lost 50 aircraft in the battle over Biak's fate.

The attack by American Central Pacific forces on Saipan, in the Marianas on June 15 suspended all future attempts at

reinforcing Biak Island. The Japanese supplying Biak now resorted to inefficient "ant transport" by means of barges, submarines and even native canoes to move men and materiel to isolated Biak. Just like the Solomans and Eastern New Guinea, however, it was a case of too little too late. The Japanese at Biak were now on their own.

Even before Operation *Kon* was officially canceled, General Fuller was aware of his higher commands' displeasure with his progress so far. As early as May 30, after the Americans captured one airfield, General Krueger had been prompted to inquire if it could be developed quickly, therefore making a quick capture of Mokmer less urgent. An engineers' report prompted General Fuller to reply that it would take some three weeks to establish an operational airstrip there, whereas he would have Mokmer in hand and operational sooner than that. But two weeks had now passed, Mokmer was still under enemy fire, and it was too late to start work on the previously surveyed airdrome.

Fuller did establish operational airfields on Biak's offshore islands, but these islands were typhus infested, a cause of many casualties among the engineers and air force personnel stationed there.

An American attack of June 11 fared no better than had previous attacks. Heavy Japanese fire from undisclosed positions prevented the troops from advancing and, in addition, kept the captured airdrome under such fire that it could not be used by engineers or by airplanes coming in to land. The only success recorded this day was information provided by escaped slave laborers of the Japanese, who reported that the main Japanese defensive positions were in deep caves hidden by jungle along the flanks of the American advance. This revelation came nearly three weeks after Fuller's forces had been attacking these undisclosed positions, and he immediately ordered the 186th Infantry Regiment to locate and destroy the enemy positions. Despite repeated efforts over the next few days, however, neither the 186th Infantry, assigned to destroying the enemy main defensive positions in the caves, nor the 162nd, assigned to capture the remaining airstrips, made any real progress.

Fuller, concerned about the condition of his troops and alarmed by reports of Japanese reinforcements landing on Biak, asked General Krueger for another infantry regiment for his task force. General Krueger ordered the 34th Infantry Regiment of the 24th Infantry Division to Biak, but he also opted for a new task force commander, while assigning Fuller strictly to command of the 41st Infantry Division. On June 14, Lt. Gen. Robert L. Eichelberger, the man who salvaged Buna for MacArthur, received an urgent summons to report to Sixth Army Headquarters immediately. Krueger appointed him commander, Hurricane Task Force, and ordered his entire I Corps headquarters to Biak.

After Eichelberger and his staff arrived on June 15, he met with Fuller, whom he found angry and upset with General Krueger for his actions. Fuller in fact had sent Krueger a letter asking to be relieved of command of the 41st Infantry Division as well, and to be reassigned to duty outside the Southwest Pacific area of operations. Eichelberger, who had been a classmate of Fuller at West Point, tried to change his mind, but the attempt failed. Fuller was relieved as requested, and left Biak June 18. His successor was Brig. Gen. Jens A. Doe, the former assistant division commander.

The battle for the interior of Biak would have been even more prolonged but for the Allies' success at cutting off the Japanese garrison from supply and reinforcement.

For Eichelberger, an experienced and highly effective commander, the first move was to stop all offensive action until reconnaissance patrols had determined exactly where the Japanese were and in what strength. Initially as frustrated as Fuller, he briefly considered the use of poison gas against the enemy, but was dissuaded by the objections of his own staff. Then, using the four infantry regiments now available to him, he attacked the Japanese from different directions and was not afraid to expose his line of communications in order to overcome a Japanese position. These aggressive tactics and the inevitable attrition of the Japanese, who were not receiving serious reinforcements, eventually overcame all resistance—by the first week in July, Biak Island had been basically secured, although Japanese stragglers would continue to be hunted down until the end of the war.

Official records indicate that the Americans lost some 474 men killed in action, 2,400 wounded. In addition to combat casualties, some 7,234 men were brought down by sickness. The Japanese lost 6,100 killed outright.

If the Japanese lost a long-forgotten battle at Biak, however, they had gained a lesson that would prove painful for American invading forces later—at Iwo Jima, Okinawa and other Pacific islands where the Japanese strategy was not to defend at the beach line but, later, from caves, pillboxes and other well-entrenched positions. In its own obscure way, Biak cost America dearly in her young men. □

Nathan N. Prefer, a career civil servant from Long Island, N.Y., has had a lifelong interest in military history and has studied at the graduate level at the City University of New York. This article is excerpted from a manuscript in progress covering the entire Western New Guinea campaign. Further reading: Eagle Against The Sun, *by Ronald H. Spector.*

After Armed Guard duty aboard the merchantmen, regular Navy duty seemed like "a rest."

By Richard P. Montpelier

"Loose lips sink ships," said those wartime posters. And surely they did, although the actual instrument of destruction most often was the enemy submarine, aircraft, warship or floating mine. And for the enemy, especially with advance knowledge supplied by "loose lips" or other intelligence, what a shooting gallery it was!

All those lumbering merchantmen, those fat tankers or troopships . . . what match were they for Germany's wolf packs of U-boats? For the Japanese or Italian subs? For the enemy aircraft or occasional warship that found them out as they plied the high seas carrying their vital cargo or troops abroad?

They also served. 20mm AA Gun—Transport Enroute Brazil, *by Reginald Marsh, portrays the Naval Armed Guard on typical duty: tedium that anticipated very sudden punctuations of terror.*

These were not exactly gun-bristling American or Royal Navy battleships carrying replenishment across the wide water, but rather your traditionally unarmed freighter. Usually, no creature of war . . . but often war's helpless victim, yes. Usually, but not always, and herein hangs the tale so ably told by Justin Gleichauf in his newly published *Unsung Sailors: The Naval Armed Guard in World War II* (Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Md., 1990, $29.95).

How many among us realize that among the millions who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and among the thousands who went into battle, hardly any saw as much sustained combat (or suffered such heavy casualties) as the 144,000 Americans assigned to protect the merchant ships—the U.S. Naval Armed Guard? How many of us were aware that these unsung heroes were radio operators, signalmen, gun crewmen and medics shipped out aboard 6,000 traditionally non-combatant vessels repeatedly sent into harm's way to deliver their goods?

Gleichauf, a veteran intelligence officer retired from the CIA, has based this long-missing history of the Armed Guard on Navy files, general and maritime war histories, after-action reports, convoy reports—all of them predictable while yet valuable sources.

What really enlivens his book and renders its history lessons so real is the added step he took in his five years of research—he tracked down scores of still-living AG veterans and thus could base much of this largely untold story on interviews or correspondence with 150 former Armed Guardsmen.

And the stories they do tell! The punishing conditions they do describe! The dedication they do reveal! And . . . the sacrifice.

Here's a short diary bit contributed by John Mitchell, serving nearly 50 years ago as a gunner aboard the merchantman *Thomas Hartley*: "Fifth day of storm, getting even worse and also a blizzard to top things off. Everything covered with ice, taking seas over the flying bridge, up to the top of the stack and down inside the engine room. Two portside lifeboats smashed to pieces and washed away . . . ice freezing on clothes."

Consider, from the same chapter on the epic Battle of the Atlantic, the story of the AG men stationed aboard the Liberty ship *William C. Gorgas* on a run from the United States to Liverpool with TNT, food, steel and landing craft among the cargo items. The Liberty ship was struck—and sunk—by German torpedoes the night of March 10, 1943.

Fifty-one men from the ship managed to climb aboard rafts and lifeboats—with the skipper, T.C. Ellis, giving up a spot on a raft to a young seaman and then disappearing into the deep. The others were picked up by the British destroyer *Harvester* the next day.

Within six hours, however, *Harvester* herself was torpedoed and sunk on the high seas. She had been damaged and was limping after ramming a German U-boat. A French corvette, *Aconit*, ultimately destroyed the U-boat, and then picked up *Harvester*'s survivors. They, in turn, included the *Gorgas* survivors, by now reduced to just 12 men, five of them Armed Guardsmen. As one of those five told author Gleichauf, he served "10 long months" as a Naval Armed Guard before "being sent to destroyer duty for a rest."

Overall, as they sailed nearly countless voyages on their 6,000 merchant ships during the war, their fate, day by day, was anybody's guess. Take the crew—and Armed Guard—of the brand-new Liberty ship *James W. Denver*, slowed by engine trouble 250 miles southwest of the Canaries, with a load of P-38 fighter planes aboard . . . and sunk by two torpedoes.

The survivors were left adrift on the sea. On the second night, a German submarine rose from the depths right under one of the lifeboats and surfaced with the boat stranded on the U-boat's deck. "A German officer asked them where they came from. 'Brooklyn' was the reply. The officer laughed and in English said, 'That's where baseball comes from.' "

He knew they were from a new Liberty ship ("loose lips?"). His crew gave the Americans a carton of cigarettes, while he provided a course for them to follow in their lifeboat. The U-boat then moved

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off into the night. "Twenty-three days later, after living on four crackers and two ounces of water per day, fighting heavy seas, and once coming so close to a pod of seven whales that they could have hit them with a stone, they were picked up by a fishing vessel 50 miles off the West African coast," notes Gleichauf's book.

Not so happy an ending could be written for the tanker *Esso Williamsburg:*

Set sail for Iceland in September 1942, navy fuel aboard. From Aruba to the North Atlantic. Forty-two regular crewmen aboard and the Navy Armed Guard of 18. Voyage never completed. Reason unknown. This ship simply disappeared.

Naturally, there were triumphs, too. That's why the Naval Armed Guard was there—to give the wallowing merchantmen a formidable "sting." They didn't sink any battleships, but they downed aircraft, hurt submarines and did damage to surface warships.

As the Naval Armed Guard motto said, "Our aim is to deliver." They usually did, but it wasn't always easy. Gleichauf ably tells the dramatic history behind the sailings that were safely completed and behind those that unfortunately weren't.

THREE WHO SERVED

When the subject of World War II in the Pacific is mentioned, most of us think of the tough island-hopping campaigns conducted by General Douglas MacArthur's forces, or the great naval battles such as Midway. But a fuller understanding of the Pacific War requires us to go further in our studies, and in the past few years quite a few memoirs have been published by participants in World War II. Many of those personal memoirs concern lesser known actions and organizations. Two such accounts are contained in the memoirs and diary of former prisoners of the Japanese in the fall of the Philippine Islands—*Philippine Diary: A Journal of Life as a Japanese Prisoner of War*, by Robert A. Barker, The Robert A Barker Foundation, 1990, $37.50; and *Apocalypse Undone: My Survival of Japanese Imprisonment During World War II*, by Preston John Hubbard, Vanderbilt University Press, 1990, $23.95.

Philippine Diary is actually a posthumous publication of the POW diary entries by Robert Barker from May 1942 until shortly before his death while a POW. The diary was given to a fellow POW and, after the war, passed on to Captain Barker's family. It is published verbatim. This fact makes it a valuable historical tool, but at the same time limits its interest to the general reader.

Like Barker, Preston John Hubbard became a prisoner of the Japanese during the fall of the Philippines in 1942. Hub-

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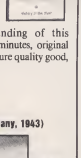

Hitler's greatest military victory—the conquest of Holland, Belgium, and France in the spring of 1940—is graphically documented in this special Nazi feature. Here is the onslaught of panzers, aircraft, and infantry that stunned the World. Film from special front-line camera crews, captured Allied footage, and animated maps enhance the viewer's understanding of this awesome blitzkrieg. B&W, 120 minutes, original German sound, English subtitles (picture quality good, sound quality varies). $35.95 #021

DIE FRONTSCHAU (The Front Shows) (Germany, 1943)

A tool of the trade: German assault engineers attack Soviet positions with fire.

Never shown to the German public during the war, *Die Frontschau* are unique combat documentaries presenting the individual actions of a company or battalion in a single engagement. This program features Front Show 5/6: "Mountain Troops Fight for a Village", depicting the assault on Baronowice in Soviet Eastern Poland in 1941; Front Show 7: "Attack of Tanks and Infantry Against a Village"; and Front Show 8: "Defensive Battle in Winter"; filmed by German cameramen on the Leningrad front. B&W, 60 minutes, English subtitles. $29.95 #022

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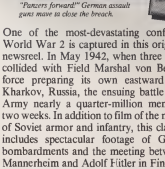
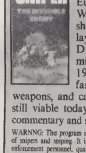


"Panzers forward!" German assault guns move to close the breach.

One of the most-devastating confrontations of World War 2 is captured in this original German newsreel. In May 1942, when three Soviet armies collided with Field Marshal von Beck's German force preparing its own eastward offensive at Kharkov, Russia, the ensuing battle cost the Red Army nearly a quarter-million men in less than two weeks. In addition to film of the massed attacks of Soviet armor and infantry, this classic newsreel includes spectacular footage of German aerial bombardments and the meeting between Marshal Mannerheim and Adolf Hitler in Finland. B&W, 27 minutes, English subtitles. $29.95 #277

GERMAN SNIPER: THE INVISIBLE ENEMY (Germany, 1944)



Silent, motionless, and deadly, German snipers lurked on the European battlefields of World War 2, hunting enemy sharp-shooters, supporting assaults, and laying diabolical traps on defense. Drawn from two German military-training films made in 1944, this program provides fascinating views of tactics, weapons, and camouflage techniques that are still viable today. B&W, 67 minutes, English commentary and subtitles. $35.95 #379

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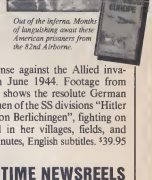

Out of the inferno. Months of languishing await these American prisoners from the 82nd Airborne.

Drawn exclusively from original German films, here are the coastal bunkers, heavy bunkers, heavy artillery, troops, and commanders including von Runstedt, Rommel, and Sepp Dietrich—that made up "Fortress Europe", the main line of defense against the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944. Footage from front-line cameramen shows the resolute German defenders, including men of the SS divisions "Hitler Youth" and "Goetz von Berlichingen", fighting on France's beaches and in her villages, fields, and forests. B&W, 88 minutes, English subtitles. $39.95 #279

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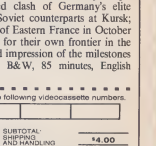

The "Watch on the Rhine": Grenadiers load for the last battles.

The rise and fall of German military fortunes are traced in these five original Nazi newsreels from 1941 to 1945. Here are the great campaigns: Hitler's sneak attack against Soviet Russia, with scenes of Army Group North advancing toward Leningrad; the 1942 capture of Sevastopol by von Manstein's 30th Army Corps; the gigantic armored clash of Germany's elite divisions and their Soviet counterparts at Kursk; the German defense of Eastern France in October 1944; and the battle for their own frontier in the final months. A vivid impression of the milestones of World War 2. B&W, 85 minutes, English subtitles. $35.95 #341

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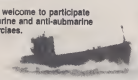

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bard, however, was able to survive his ordeal as a POW, both in the Philippines and later in Japan. His book, *Apocalypse Undone*, was written after four decades of reflection, resulting in both benefits and detractions to his work. Scattered throughout his memoirs are comments on events that took place as seen after 40 years of clarification and some research. He shows an obvious bias and resentment against the U.S. Army officer corps, both before and after his capture.

Hubbard's description of life as a POW is interesting and insightful. Especially chilling is his description of his transfer to Japan aboard a Japanese "Hell Ship." *Apocalypse Undone* is well worth reading to understand just how badly the Japanese treated American POWs. One should, however, be leery of the historical analysis Hubbard insists on providing throughout the book.

Half a continent away from the perils of life as a POW, Roger Hilsman was conducting his own little-known war in the jungles of Burma. His motivation connected him to the POWs in the Philippines; his father, an Army colonel, was among those held captive. *American Guerrilla: My War Behind Japanese Lines*, by Roger Hilsman (Brassey's [US] Inc., 1990, $21.95) is by far the best of these three Pacific war books. Like *Apocalypse Undone*, it is a personal memoir written with 40 some years of hindsight. But unlike Hubbard, Hilsman does not let his subsequent insights and understanding of events color his narration of his World War II activities. Hilsman's description of his actions is a classic account of what a small group of dedicated young soldiers can accomplish under difficult circumstances and conditions.

Hilsman relates how he and his group worked among the various peoples living in his area of operations and how they cooperated to defeat a common enemy. At the close of the book he discusses some thoughts on guerrilla warfare and on the Vietnam War. Having served as a senior adviser to President Kennedy on Vietnam, Hilsman brings some excellent credentials to the subject.

In the end, it is the actions and accomplishments of men under harsh and trying conditions that tie these three works together. In a prison camp, accomplishment may simply mean staying alive for one more day. In Burma it may be the harassment and delay of the enemy. But in the long run it is really about overcoming difficulty. These three tales help fill in the picture of human perseverance in some of World War II's less well-known operations. **Michael A. Kirtland**

Thunderbolt Odyssey: P-47 War in Europe, *by Kemal Sajed, Stonewood Press, Tulsa, Okla., 1990, $16.95.*

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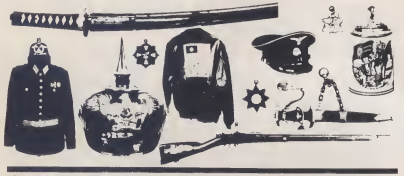

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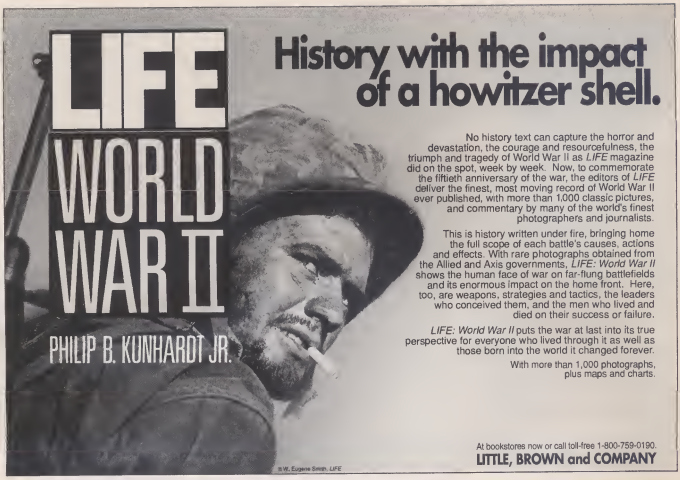

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Undercover

Continued from page 16

In late 1943, now Lt. Col. Balchen left Greenland for the Pentagon and full orientation on the European Theater of Operations. He was then assigned to help solve the Allied internment "problem" in Sweden. There were 2,000 elite Norwegian pilot cadets held in Sweden under internment who would be sorely needed for the eventual liberation of their homeland. Additionally, the Norwegian government-in-exile itself was stagnating in Stockholm, after escaping the German occupation of Norway in 1940. Moreover, 1,500 American airmen now were languishing in internment after they chose to land in Sweden rather than ditch their disabled aircraft in the North Sea after missions over Germany. All governments concerned wanted a change in their status, desperately.

An airlift would be the most expeditious means of evacuating these special personnel from Sweden to England, but how to resolve the diplomatic problem of a neutral nation caught between warring parties? Further, any rescue flights would have to cross directly over occupied Norway or at least pass close by. Germany had 250 fighters and numerous anti-aircraft batteries stationed there.

In sum, Sweden could not maintain neutrality if Allied military aircraft were permitted free passage across its borders. Any attempted flights—if allowed at all—would have very limited logistic support for the return leg, and there was the ever-present Nazi factor to consider both in Norway and Sweden. Balchen, however, was undismayed—he removed all military insignia from six B-24s, painted them emerald green and applied British civil registration numbers, thus creating a phony airline. The crews wore civilian clothing (but no parachutes) and carried passports and civilian licenses issued by the American Embassy in London.

British authorities opposed the plan initially, but Balchen had held lengthy diplomatic negotiations for the release of the Norwegians and Americans before approaching the British and refused to take no for an answer. Moreover, the Swedes had approved the operation for a 90-day period.

Balchen passed the word to Norway's King Haakon, who then contacted Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Two days later, on March 31, 1944, the first rescue flight started from Leuchars, Scotland, to Stockholm and return. The Royal Air Force (RAF) cooperated fully throughout the project's duration.

All of the internees eventually were flown out to Scotland, but the Swedes only allowed three aircraft arrivals and

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Glory days: Bernt Balchen overflies Admiral Richard E. Byrd's base at Little America, Antarctica, in 1929.

departures in any 24-hour period. The situation demanded packing about 35 persons into a hastily converted bomber for the eight-hour flight, but no one complained about the discomfort nor about the danger posed by overflying Norway. Only one of the B-24s was lost during the entire project, shot down over the North Sea in late 1944 by anti-aircraft fire from a Russian ship. The Reds claimed they mistook it for an enemy Ju-88. They picked up the survivors and returned them to Leuchars 10 days later.

There were other hazards involved. Nazi secret agents pursued Allied personnel relentlessly in Stockholm and ransacked their hotel rooms trying to learn the times and routes of the flights (post-war records confirmed they knew of the planned evacuations from the start), but they were never successful in their quest. Nor did the Allied crews have the advantage of darkness in the northern latitudes, since daylight prevailed for 20 hours or more during the summer months. But excellent counterintelligence had determined that Norway was very lightly defended by anti-aircraft guns between 61 and 62 degrees north latitude. This area also happened to be far removed from the enemy fighter bases. Additionally, British radar stations assisted the flights by providing evasion courses from the patrol paths of German fighter planes.

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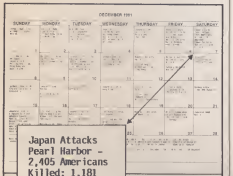
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President Dwight D. Eisenhower awards Bernt Balchen the Clifford B. Harmon International Trophy in 1953.

operated an established civil airline between Sweden and the United Kingdom, and its personnel now provided invaluable assistance to its pseudo-civil counterpart on many occasions.

Despite all wartime obstacles, the Carpetbaggers managed to achieve the greater portion of their original mission by the end of 1944, with more than 3,000 passengers taken from internment. In addition, countless acts of aid to the war effort were accomplished—importing critical ball bearings that were transshipped from Norway to Britain was one such feat. Overall, more than 4,300 persons were transported out, while tools, parts and mechanics were flown in, allowing the Americans to repair two-thirds of their 200 aircraft parked in Sweden.

Some of the flights were totally humanitarian. In one case when no landing strip was available, two doctors and a nurse were parachuted into the scene of a Norwegian mine explosion to aid the injured. In July 1944, Lt. Col. Keith Allen flew a C-47 on a Carpetbagger project mission to pick up a damaged but intact V-2 rocket—the first to arrive in Britain in good enough condition for scientists to learn most of its secrets. (Launched in Germany without a warhead for test purposes, it had landed in Sweden instead of the Baltic Sea as intended.)

Both peers and subordinates had high praise for Balchen and his leadership style. John R. Hirsch of New City, N.Y., a ground crewman who served under Balchen at Leuchars, said, "He was a regular guy, and none of the GIs could get away with the usual 'badmouthing' of a commander, lest he had some of his peers to reckon with." While Balchen

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treated everyone, from private to general, with a "touch of velvet," there was, beneath the quiet, unruffled exterior, a steel core in this man.

The Carpetbagger missions called for firm yet diplomatic leadership. Balchen had to thread his way among the interests of his own adopted United States, Britain, Norway, Sweden, and even the Soviet Union and Iceland.

After the war, Balchen remained in the U.S. Air Force to develop arctic survival techniques and aircraft polar routes—many of them still in use today. He retired from military service in 1956 and began consultant work again for individuals and firms such as General Dynamics and Douglas Aircraft.

Colonel Balchen was the recipient of numerous awards, medals and tributes during his long, daring and heroic career. Medals he earned for his American military service include the Legion of Merit; the Distinguished Flying Cross; the Air Medal with five clusters; the City of Paris Gold Star; Norway's highest, the Commander of St. Olav; and Denmark's highest, the King Christian X Medal of Freedom.

One "intangible" salute to Colonel Balchen came most unexpectedly and was one of his favorites. He and Mrs. Balchen were on a Norwegian commercial aircraft en route to Stockholm in 1972 when a stewardess handed him a note from the pilot. It read: "Thanks for the ride on the Liberator in 1944. . .otherwise I wouldn't be here today."

Bernt Balchen died in October 1973 at a New York hospital and was buried at Arlington National Cemetery on the day that would have been his 74th birthday. □

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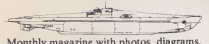

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Personality

Continued from page 8

regiment located in the northwest section of the bulge, attached to the Sixtieth Army under the talented 35-year-old General Ivan Danielovich Cherniakhovsky, who would later command the 3rd Belorussian Front as the Soviet Union's youngest field marshal, only to be killed by a shell splinter on February 18, 1945, during fighting at Königsberg.

The Kursk offensive—Operation Citadel—was Hitler's last chance to regain the initiative on the Eastern Front. Kursk was where Hitler showed all that he could do—introducing tanks (the 70-ton Ferdinand, the heavy Tiger and the Panther) and new self-propelled guns . . . all of the newest military technology.

But the Soviets had introduced some new and powerful weapons of their own: the KV-85, a precursor of the Josef Stalin heavy tank; and powerful self-propelled artillery like the SU-152, which the Russians nicknamed *"Zverobot"* (hunter of wild beasts) because of its ability to knock the turret off a Tiger or disembowl a Panther.

Major Petrenko was in charge of an infantry regiment when the fighting over the Kursk salient began on July 4, 1943, but, because of his past successes, he was given the chance to command a full division before the battle was over. "By that time," Petrenko noted, "I already had the Second and Third Orders of Suvorov; the First Order was awarded only to commanding generals at the front. It was a new and challenging responsibility to command a division of 9,600 soldiers and officers but, as things worked out, I was able to work out whatever kinks there were and carried out my duties."

At Kursk, Hitler's Germany lost any possibilities of victory, but it remained to the Soviets to launch and sustain a follow-up offensive of their own—previously, Soviet victories had always been followed by poorly executed counteroffensives that ended in costly defeat at the hands of the tenacious German troops and their often brilliant commanders.

After withdrawing across the Dnieper River in the Ukraine, the Germans dug in, knowing that the Dnieper presented a natural barrier that could be used to hold the Soviets back for an indefinite period of time. And, for the Soviets, so important was it to breach that barrier, that an order came down from Stalin to all divisional and regimental commanders saying that whoever led a full army or corps across the Dnieper, opened a bridgehead and defended it, would earn the USSR's highest order—the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union (HSU).

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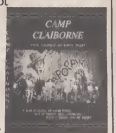

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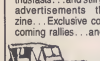

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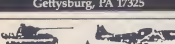

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Meanwhile, on September 27, a platoon from the 240th Rifle Division established a new bridgehead at Lyutezh, 12 miles north of the ancient Ukrainian capital of Kiev. It was not until October 3 that General Nikolai F. Vatutin, commander of the Voronezh Front, recognized the possibilities of that new front and ordered General A.G. Kravchenko's Fifth Guards Tank Army to back it up. Finding a ford only seven feet deep at the adjacent Desna River, the Soviet tank crews made their T-34s watertight with putty and pitch and then, using improvised snorkels, drove 90 of them underwater to the other side. The discovery of two abandoned German barges—damaged but intact—made the crossing of the Dnieper itself in October easier for about 60 tanks.

Again, the German 68th, 88th and 208th infantry divisions managed to contain the Soviet threat, but the front's political commissar, Lt. Gen. Nikita I. Khrushchev, also saw the potential pre-

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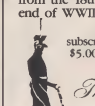

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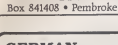

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sented by the Lyutezh bridgehead and prevailed on Stavka, the Soviet High Command, to commit more forces to achieving a breakout there. Aided by the cover of pouring rain, General Vatutin skillfully shifted the Thirty-eighth Army and Third Guards Tank Army 125 miles north to Lyutezh, leaving behind dummy tanks and all his communications equipment to keep German attention on the Bukrin Bend. On November 3, after an "artillery overture" by 2,000 guns and 500 rocket launchers, the Fifth Guards Tank Army spearheaded the breakout from Lyutezh and the fight for Kiev. On the night of November 4, Colonel-General Pyotr S. Rybalko's Third Guards Tank Army crossed the Dnieper and, with infantry riding aboard its T-34s, staged one of the wildest tank charges of the war—with headlights glaring, sirens shrieking and machine guns blazing away. The T-34s broke through the three defending German infantry divisions, and then turned south for Kiev, followed by the Thirty-eighth Army.

Petrenko had been promoted to colonel and was in command of the 226th Rifle Division. There were five regiments in the division—three infantry or rifle regiments, one artillery and one anti-aircraft—plus a few odd battalions. Petrenko's previous regimental command, the 965th Rifle Regiment, was among the first reinforcing infantry units to fight their way across the Dnieper. The rest of his division now joined the 965th and succeeded in establishing a 20-kilometer front, holding it against all counterattacks and making it possible to launch further attacks.

"It was a cruel, difficult battle," comments Petrenko. "Three of my regimental colonels had to be replaced during the fighting—two were killed outright, the other fatally wounded in action. One of my bravest regimental commanders, a Jewish fellow named Colonel Khaletsky, was hit by a German tank at point-blank range and totally torn to bits."

On the morning of November 7, Kiev fell to the Soviets, giving cause for extra fireworks over Moscow as it celebrated the 26th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution the next day. In all, about 2,000 orders of Hero of the Soviet Union were awarded to participants in the fight to secure Kiev. Colonel Petrenko was one of 27 soldiers and officers of the 226th Division to whom it was awarded; only 12 of them were alive to receive it.

After crossing the Dnieper, the advancing Soviets faced another water obstacle, the Dniester. Beyond it lay the Romanian and Czechoslovakian borders. Petrenko's 226th division took part in the Lwow Operation. Historically, the region around Lwow had been Polish territory but, in 1939, it was "reunited" as part of

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the Soviet Ukraine. It then was overrun by the Germans two years later. From Lwow now, the Soviets crossed the Vistula River into the Sandomir region, opening the way for the famous Vistula-Oder Operation, involving two fronts: the 1st Ukrainian Front under Marshal Ivan Koney, advancing on Prague, Czechoslovakia, and the 1st Byelorussian Front under Marshal Konstantin Rokossovski, moving toward Berlin.

As 1945 began, Petrenko commanded the 60th Infantry Division, attached to Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front. "We were southwest of Warsaw," noted Petrenko, "with orders to liberate Krakow. It was my division's fate that, after liberating that ancient Polish capital we would be sent to Hitler's worst death camp." He meant Auschwitz.

On January 19, 1945, the 60th Infantry Division was 60 or 70 kilometers southwest of Krakow, part of a flanking movement ordered by Konev to capture the city intact. It was one of five divisions, under the overall command of General Mikhail Krasavin, that were advancing to engage two German divisions and five battalions of Polish *"Polizei,"* defending the concentration camp complex at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

As the Soviets approached, the Germans destroyed a major part of the death camp and, while their soldiers tried to hold the Russians off, 80,000 inmates were hastily evacuated on a "death march" to Buchenwald, where the process of extermination could continue. Whoever limped or walked too slowly was shot by the Germans. Later, the Soviets had no trouble in retracing the path—corpses lay along the roadside all along the route.

The battle for Auschwitz commenced when the Soviets occupied the west bank of the Vistula and came upon the I.G. Farben chemical plant. General Krasavin's strategy was, significantly, not to attack directly, but to attempt to encircle the German defenders. Only the 100th Rifle Division attacked the camp directly. Petrenko's 60th Division was ordered to drive on to the northern flank, where it succeeded in catching some enemy troops who had dropped their guns and were running from the town of Auschwitz. Farther south, another division succeeded in routing a sizable formation of the retreating enemy. In so doing, they made it possible to save 10,000 prisoners still in the camp.

After completing the encirclement of Auschwitz and the elimination of remaining pockets of German resistance, Petrenko visited the camp to see what could be done for those prisoners whom the Germans had not had time to kill or evacuate. Among them was Elie Weisel, who later would win the Nobel Peace

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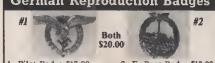

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Prize. Another survivor whose acquaintance Petrenko made was Elias Borowski, later a businessman in New York whom Petrenko would visit in 1989 while participating in a 50th-anniversary lecture tour in the United States. "A large proportion of those survivors had successful lives after the war," Petrenko observed. "I wish them all many more years of life and success in their work."

The liberated inmates with enough strength joined Petrenko and his comrades in laying flowers over the graves of 160 soldiers of the 100th Rifle Division who had died during the fighting in and around the concentration camp and who were buried at the gate. At Krakow, more of Petrenko's men were also buried in a single ceremony, including 200 soldiers and officers who were killed in action liberating Auschwitz. "Then," recounted Petrenko, "it was back to work. The enemy did not give up right away, and there was much fighting yet to be done as we liberated Rebnik in Poland, then Stanberg and other Czechoslovakian cities."

May 8, 1945, V-E Day, found Petrenko at Ruzina Airport, not far from the city of Prague. The German High Command had surrendered in Berlin on May 2, 1945, but that was not quite the end of it. Field Marshal Ferdinand Schörner's army still put up armed resistance—the only Germans to fight on—because he did not want to give up to the Soviets, only to the Americans. Therefore, Petrenko's division had more battles to fight—on May 5, 8, 9 and 10. "On May 10, my Armenian divisional chief of staff, Colonel Ashot Artunov, was killed by German arms. He had seven children at home. It was so sad that he had to die after the surrender."

On May 8, German Field Marshal Schörner left his headquarters at Josefov, Bohemia, boarded a light plane and vanished. Two days later, the last of his men surrendered to Petrenko's troops. In the middle of the month, Schörner himself turned up in Austria, dressed as a Tyrolian peasant. On May 22, the Americans handed him over to the Soviets.

With the end of the war, Petrenko was sent directly to the Higher Military Academy of General Staff to gain more theoretical information and, at the same time, to share his battle experience. In the course of that study, he was awarded the Gold Medal of Excellence.

For 17 years (1946-1963), he served as chief of tactics and operational arts at the Frunze Academy. He also served as First Deputy Commander for the Combined Forces, attaining the rank of lieutenant general. Retired from military service in 1967, Vassily Petrenko is now active in the Soviet Committee of War Veterans, and with the Retired Generals and Admirals for Peace and Disarmament. □

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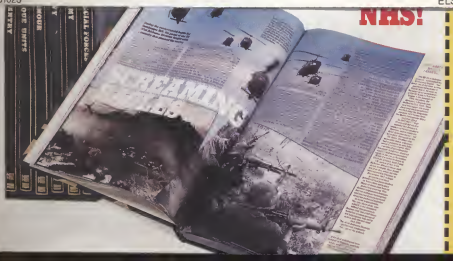

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Glenn Miller w/Tex Beneke

One Dozen Roses
Harry James

Ole Buttermilk Sky
Kay Kyser

To Each His Own
Freddy Martin

Temptation
Per

Mar
Jimmy Do
E

(I'll Be
In Apple
Andre

Auf W
Swe
Ve

White
Gord

G
John

It Might As Well Be Spring
Paul Weston w/Margaret Whiting

The Very Thought Of You
Vaughn Monroe

Star Dust
Tommy Dorsey w/Frank Sinatra & The Pied Pipers

I Can't Begin To Tell You

You Always Hurt The One You Love
Sammy Kaye vocal: Billy Williams

A Nightingale Sang In Berkley Square
Glenn Miller vocal: Ray Eberle

When The Lights Go On Again All Over The World

Dearly Beloved
Glenn Miller vocal: Skip Nelson

I Left My Heart At The Stage Door Canteen
Sammy Kaye vocal: Don Cornell

Let's Take The Long Way Home
Cab Calloway

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